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# Trans-Atlantic Elements in the Domestic Policy Attitudes of the British and American Conservative Movements, 1980-1990.

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Trans-Atlantic elements in the Domestic policy attitudes of the British and  
American Conservative Movements, 1980-1990.

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Arts.

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The College of William and Mary  
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## APPROVAL PAGE

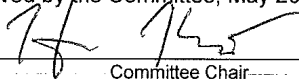
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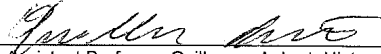
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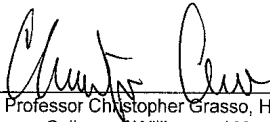


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## ABSTRACT

Trans-Atlantic elements in the Domestic policy attitudes of the British and American Conservative Movements, 1980-1990.

This paper explores the relationship between British and American Conservative activists during the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan dominated the politics of their respective countries. It does so mainly via looking at the most popular right-wing magazines in either country at the time; *The Spectator* and *National Review*.

Liberal International? The American takeover of London's *Spectator* newspaper, 1859-1861.

This paper casts a critical eye on the few previous histories of this period in the history of London's *The Spectator* newspaper; a brief two years when it was owned edited by Americans working for the Buchanan administration in London. It goes on to attempt to analyse what the paper in the period reveals about similarities in British and American politics and about relations between the British Liberal and American Democratic parties.

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I would also like to thank *The Spectator* magazine and especially their archivist (s). The work done to upload the entire back catalogue of nearly two centuries worth of editions proved to be exceptionally useful for both sections of this thesis. The consequent ease of access to these source materials means I will be forever in their debt.

This Thesis is dedicated to the slackers. Even we can limp over the line at points. In particular, amongst those brave souls it is to my brother Tom and my father I pay tribute. Without their assistance and advice this would not have been done.



## **Intellectual Biography**

For my first research paper on The Atlantic World I struggled to pick a topic at first. The focus of Atlantic history seemed to be on cultural practices and relations rather than the directly political history which I am most interested in.

Furthermore, the nature of Atlantic History seems to lead historians of the field to analyse the period of colonisation and the early stages of independent nations in the New world. This did not fit well with my passion for twentieth century politics. However, after discussion with Dr Aubert it became apparent that a paper which focused on modern Anglo-American politics was within the scope of the research paper.

Early on I realised that I wanted the focus of my paper to be conservatism.

Political ideology fascinates me. For my undergraduate research I attempted to analyse the ideology of Senator Richard Russell of Georgia during the 1950s and 60s. A major aspect of this was attempting to establish what being a “conservative” meant in the period, and whether Russell fit into such a definition.

It was when studying Russell that I first used *National Review* as a historical source. Having spent this time focusing on a conservative figure, as well as much more time on both Reagan and Thatcher’s governments than others, I was far more aware of the history of conservative rather than socialist or liberal ideology.

My experience was not the sole reason for my decision. Much of contemporary political science and political history focuses on Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Historians of both America and Britain identify them as having caused

great change in their respective countries and around the world. In addition, the idea of the “special relationship” was reinforced by the closeness of the two leaders and their similar ideological vision. Indeed, the 1980s were unique in how similarly the British and American heads of government saw the world. The emergence of the conservative “New Right” as the dominant political force happened at the same time in both nations, and there is significant if not substantial historical literature on this development. Given that I had decided I wanted to compare British and American political ideology, conservatism in the 1980s emerged as a topic of interest.

It was apparent to me that it would be almost impossible to offer any fresh research on Thatcher and Reagan based on the amount of investigation there has already been, as well as time and source constraints. What has been less closely examined is the movement (the “Conservative Movement”) which Thatcher and Reagan were figureheads of. At first I had the idea of exploring the origins of the movement in the late 60s and early 70s, perhaps drawing on some my past investigation into Richard Russell, before an analysis of how the movement developed once it gained power through the 1980s. I considered drawing upon an array of private think-tanks, academics, as well as political journals and magazines. It became apparent however, that this was far too broad for the research paper. Thus it had to be narrowed down to the 1980s. This was the period when there was most clearly a New Right in both nations that could be compared and contrasted.

The mass of sources meant the project remained unfeasible. Comparing the New Right as a whole in Britain and the United States would be worthy of a monograph at least. The history that has been written of the non-politicians of the New Right has often focused on think-tanks. That fact, combined with ease of access to sources, meant that I decided popular right-wing publications were the best thing for me to research. By comparing similar newspapers in either country I could get a sense of what typical “New Right” attitudes were. *The Spectator* and *National Review* were by far the most popular right-wing weekly political publications in Britain and America respectively. They could thus serve as useful gauges of popular opinion amongst the New Right.

My paper focused primarily on comparing the ideology evident in these two newspapers. What it found was a large degree of overlap on both economic (free market, competition and fiscal policy) and social issues. The papers were broadly shared an ideological outlook which combined historically liberal economics focusing on freedom with a traditional outlook on social issues. Crucially, the economic arguments centred around the justness of competition and the freedom to act in the market. In addition, the justification for socially conservative policies was rarely seen by the authors of the magazines as anti-freedom. Rather, arguments were constructed in a way which suggested that the constraints they wanted on certain practices was not about governmental regulation, but supposedly the avoidance of privileging certain people and practices. As such there was a clear ideological thread used to justify economic and social policy in both countries.

Probably what was most striking was just how similar the ideological case made in both newspapers was. The “Special Relationship” was reflected at the grassroots level as well as the governmental. In addition, it was interesting to discover evidence of common influences on the New Right on either side of the Atlantic from Neoliberal academics and economists.

My paper gives a snapshot rather than a clear picture of the New Right due its relatively narrow focus. If I were to expand on it, I would try and consider think-tanks and policy advisors as well as more newspapers. In order to improve the paper as it is I would expand the newspapers used as sources. I had planned to use Britain’s *Salisbury Review* and *The Wall Street Journal* as well. However, once I did so it became apparent that *The Wall Street Journal* was far more consistently liberal in its outlook than the other papers. It shared a passion for the free market, but this was largely unmitigated by conservative attitudes. I felt therefore that it would not make for a fair trans-Atlantic comparison so dropped it. To improve my paper, I would like to consider *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Salisbury Review* and other papers. I would attempt to draw out the differences evident in the magazines and attempt to explore what these differences might mean, and whether they are different in either country.

I was far less clear on a topic for my second research paper on the Early American Republic. Beyond one class in my freshman year of undergraduate studies on American expansion, it was a period I had not studied at either school or university. It also lay outside of my favoured twentieth century period.

I decided that I wished to continue to analyse political ideology. Having used the press as evidence in my first paper, it also seemed sensible to continue down that path. After my first paper it felt to me that a newspaper was an excellent and efficient way to study a large number of policy opinions and an overall ideology. If one can locate copies of the paper easily it also reduces the need to go to an archive or research primary sources so extensively. In addition, having focused so much on conservative politics I decided I should do if not the opposite, then different politics. As such liberalism emerged as the ideology to study and in the American context the Democrats as the party to look at.

At first I wished to do a similar analysis to my first paper, but focusing only on one country rather than a trans-Atlantic approach. I had the idea of seeking out a strongly pro-Democratic newspaper from the 1850s and using it as a lens to judge the political ideology of the Democrats in the era. However, speaking to Dr Grasso he suggested that such history had been well covered.

Lacking a clear topic, my attention turned to *The Spectator*. Having used it as a major source in my first paper I knew it had once been a very liberal newspaper. I was also aware that the London paper had for a period been taken over by Buchananite Democrats. Having been so little covered by historians, this seemed like a viable source to focus on for the research paper. I was hopeful that I would find clear evidence both of Democratic and (British) Liberal Party ideology in the paper, and evidence for how similar their respective ideologies were. In addition,

I hoped that there might be some historical significance to be drawn upon regarding the effort by Americans to control a British newspaper.

As it turned out, my research topic was not greatly illuminating. My hope for evidence of ideological overlap was met, but little of the paper presented anything new on the topic. It seemed to confirm ideas which have been expressed previously, especially by R. Kelley. The analysis of the newspaper itself was interesting both to write and to do the research for. However, my conclusion was that the paper was relatively insignificant. It was a remarkable and unique incidence but there is little evidence either of any input from senior statesman or that the paper had much influence on British attitudes to America. Thus interesting as the paper was to research, it was somewhat lacking in research which offered historically significant new opinions.

If I were to expand the paper, I would borrow an idea from my first paper and compare it directly to an American newspaper of the same era. This would create a broader scope with which to analyse the nature of American and Democratic party ideology. I would also consider comparing it in depth to other British Liberal papers of the time rather than merely in passing. Researching another paper in depth may reveal differences in *The Spectator's* coverage which were not apparent by focusing so squarely on it alone. I would also in the future consider certain questions which my research brought up. Why did laissez-faire attitudes take over these two political parties and not other ones? Why was the American Republican Party so much more evangelical than the British Conservative Party?

Was the American Whig Party like the British Tory Party, or did Whigs merely admire Britain's apparently more aristocratic society?

## **Trans-Atlantic elements in the Domestic policy attitudes of the British and American Conservative Movements, 1980-1990.**

The rise of the Conservative Movement was the defining feature of both American and British politics in the final quarter of the twentieth century. The rise of the so-called “New Right” was so critical because it marked such a sea-change from the prevailing generally moderate trend of conservative politics in these 2 nations. Both the Republican Party in the United States and the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom had shifted towards a more moderate platform in the decades following World War Two. Most significantly, Social Democratic economic policies which used the power of government in a bid both to boost the economy, and to make society more equal, had been tacitly accepted in both countries.

Therefore, the subsequent rise of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher to the leadership of these two parties was indicative of radical transformation in right-wing politics in both countries. This paper will attempt to analyse more broadly the “Movements” of which Thatcher and Reagan were the figureheads, and how these movements related to one another rather than focusing on Reagan and Thatcher themselves. It will also seek to gauge how connected the ideas of the New Right in Britain and America were.

It would be wrong to suggest that attention has not been paid by historians to either the Conservative Movement or to the Thatcher-Reagan relationship. Most



notably, a seminal work was published in 2012 by James Cooper in which he argues that bonds of personality and similarities in rhetoric were more in evidence than actual policy similarities.<sup>1</sup> Yet for the most part historians have yet to analyse the Conservative Movement in a trans-Atlantic context. Cooper's work touches on the "New Right" but is above all a focus on the two leaders. Similar analysis by political historians of political figures, parties and institutions in the late 1970s and '80s has tended to focus on either the United Kingdom or United States. The best example of a comprehensive study of the Conservative Movement is George Nash's *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*.<sup>2</sup> When a more international approach has been taken, such as that of Mirowski and Plehwe,<sup>3</sup> it has mostly focused specifically on neoliberal economics than on Conservatism as a whole. Their work is also more about the early growth of neoliberal ideas in the mid twentieth century than its application in the latter part.

Atlantic history has generally speaking avoided history this recent. Indeed, whilst Atlantic historians aim to take an approach which allows them to examine events, interactions and perspectives beyond current or past national frameworks,<sup>4</sup> the chronological shifts in the New World seem to have had a great influence on

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<sup>1</sup> James Cooper, *Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan: A Very Political Special Relationship* (2012).

<sup>2</sup> George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (2006).

<sup>3</sup> P. Mirowski and D. Plehwe (eds.), *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge, MA, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> David Armitage, "Three Concepts of Atlantic History" in David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (2002), 13-14.

them. Relatively little attention is granted beyond the early nineteenth century and the emergence of independent states across the Americas.<sup>5</sup> However, in some ways this limited focus of Atlantic history plays to the advantage of this paper. It allows for some of the historiographical concepts beloved by Atlanticists to be deployed within a new framework.

The consistency of Anglo-American political interaction during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is significant, because it ensured that there was a consistent closeness between the United Kingdom and United States. This closeness was reflected in the political developments of the eighties; the USA and UK were the world's only major powers where spending did not rise as proportion of GDP. Thus, whilst it is common to suggest that neoliberalism has been adopted in part by all countries in the entire West in the past thirty years, the UK and US were the starting places for that development. This, combined with the cultural similarities of the two nations, makes investigating connections in political ideology worthwhile.

The term conservative is one which can be hard to define. Given the centre-right party in the United Kingdom is called the Conservatives, are they not all conservatives? The Democrats from the southern United States who opposed segregation were regularly labelled conservatives, yet it would be wrong to see Richard Russell Jr and Ronald Reagan as coming from the same political

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, the articles featured in *the Princeton Companion to Atlantic History* (2015, Princeton University Press) are on the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

tradition. The term “Movement Conservative” was adopted by some political commentators to refer to Goldwater supporters in the sixties but given that association, and its lack of relevance to the UK, it does not seem appropriate either. Instead, this paper will utilise the terms of one of its subjects, William Buckley Jr. Buckley distinguished between people who were broadly right of centre, and those whom he supported and were part of what would become known as the New Right via use of the capital “C.” Thus Gerald Ford and Michael Heseltine were conservatives, whereas Jesse Helms and Margaret Thatcher were Conservatives.

A monograph or even a doctorate which sought to investigate trans-Atlantic aspects of the Conservative Movement would have a vast range of sources to work with, ranging from think-tank publications to letters to representatives from constituents. This paper, whilst considering governmental policy, will focus heavily on two sources; the American Conservative magazine *National Review* and London’s *Spectator*. It will attempt to use the two periodicals as a lens to view the wider Conservative Movement. The aforementioned William Buckley founded *National Review* in 1955 and according to Nash, the impact of the magazine cannot be understated.<sup>6</sup> *National Review* was not merely a Conservative weekly; in many ways it launched the Conservative Movement. *The Spectator* was less consistently Conservative as opposed to conservative, but by the election of Margaret Thatcher had become solidly so with Charles Moore as

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<sup>6</sup> Nash, *The Intellectual Conservative Movement in America since 1945*, 29.

editor. Crucially, these publications did not merely seek to talk to the public or commentators. An important aspect of their existence was efforts to actually influence policy.

A case could be made that the Salisbury Review, founded in 1982, is more of a sister publication to *National Review*. However, drawing on another of Buckley's tropes, namely that one should back the most Conservative viable candidate; this paper will mainly look at *The Spectator* owing to its more mainstream status in British journalism. In addition, *The Spectator* was at its most Conservative in the 1980s with multi-millionaire Henry Keswick, husband of the head of one of the New Right's most significant think-tanks (The Centre for Policy Studies), as owner. *The Spectator* reached the British right in the same way as *National Review* did the American in terms of numbers, unlike the Salisbury Review.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, both *National Review* and *The Spectator* had the ability to attract almost any Conservative to write for them, including both Thatcher and Reagan. The centrality of these magazines to Conservatism in either country, combined with their weekly publication, makes them excellent sources from which to draw ideas about the nature of trans-Atlantic Conservatism.

How does looking at separate British and American weeklies allow for an analysis of "trans-Atlantic elements?" There are three ways in which this analysis will offer insight into the trans-Atlantic connections. Firstly, the degree of interest

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, there was a *National Review* piece in this period dedicated to the defence of the *Salisbury Review* (Joseph Sobran, "Mozart at the Piano", *National Review* 38, no.10 (06/06, 1986), 54-55.)

in and support for Conservative policies in the other country needs to be investigated. Evidence of such interest and support would highlight connections and echoes between the countries even if it does not prove genuine entanglements. Secondly, the level of similarity in the political attitudes of the newspapers will offer an insight into how connected Conservative political ideas were. Did they spring organically in each nation with common circumstances or were there common influences on the UK and US? Finally, and least significantly for this paper, actual entanglements between the governments of either country need to be briefly considered as they are the clearest instances of trans-Atlantic interaction, even if they are not necessarily reflective of Conservatism more broadly.

Conservatism with a capital “C” in this period can be broadly grouped into three central themes. These three are nationalistic foreign policy, neoliberal economics and traditionalist conservative social attitudes. This paper will not consider foreign policy due to the saturation of analysis on the topic. Far more words have been dedicated to British and American foreign policy in this era than to connections between them domestically.

Within Neoliberal economics, supply-side economics in the form of reductions in tax and spending needs to be considered, alongside Conservative support for greater competition and opposition to privilege. How it is that these ideas were tied into the writings and beliefs of neoliberal intellectuals and academics is significant, and offers clear evidence for common influence on British and

American Conservatives. Given that the free market was the cornerstone on which the Conservative Movement was first built economics are crucial to this paper. What emerges is a predictable shared belief in the freedom of the individual at the expense of the state, and a sense of market competition as being both just and necessary. This latter point reflects a “bottom-up” attitude which focused on consumer choice, as opposed to a mere defence of the rights of the wealthy. Indeed, so significant was competition to Conservatives that the desire for competition had influence beyond economics in both labour relations and education.

The combination of traditionalist, Christian-based social values with neoliberalism was an element of what made the Conservative Movement distinctive and thus an analysis of Conservative views on social issues is necessary. This paper will look chiefly at the topics associated with the “sexual revolution”, namely gay rights, women’s rights and abortion. What this demonstrates is that the focus on freedom in neoliberalism matched with traditional social ideas to create a form of Conservatism which opposed Rights-Movements but supported basic rights. Cultural liberalism was resisted, but support for draconian legal restrictions on women or homosexuals were not present (though abortion was considered separately).

### Conservatives and the free market revolution

A study of the Conservative Movement in a trans-Atlantic context must feature an attempt to examine actual entanglements between the major actors of the Movement on either side of the Atlantic. Given their positions as the figureheads of Conservatism on either side of the Atlantic, interactions between Thatcher and Reagan and their respective governments must thus be considered even in an analysis of the overall Movement such as this. This applies to the domestic issues of taxation and spending as much as it does foreign-policy. Whilst entanglements between the two were far more frequent over foreign-policy, economic ones are more significant as they are more unusual.

In order to determine whether an incident, interaction or similarity between the Thatcher and Reagan premierships is worth considering as an “entanglement” it seems appropriate to utilise the significance granted it by contemporary Conservative publications. As such, only a few of the numerous economic discussions and statements made by either side about the other will be considered here, but these incidents can speak for the period more broadly.

A *National Review* article on Thatcher’s premiership by Reagan himself demonstrates the significance shared economic values and policies had in strengthening his and Thatcher’s relationship.<sup>8</sup> He writes glowingly of Thatcher’s transformation of the British economy and suggests that he felt particularly

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<sup>8</sup> Ronald Reagan. “Margaret Thatcher and the revival of the west.” *National Review* 41, no. 9 (05/19, 1989): 21-22.

strongly about it because it mirrored what he wished to achieve in the United States. Indeed, he explicitly explains that he believes both he and Mrs Thatcher were able to influence each other's economic policy and those of other countries such as Turkey and New Zealand, referring specifically to Thatcher's privatisations of industry and his own 1981 tax cuts. It is also worth noting Reagan wrote this article in the middle of George H. W. Bush's term as President, at a point where he was starting to turn away from the economic positions of the Reagan administration. Whilst certainty is impossible, there is a suggestion that the narrative picture Reagan paints is designed at least in part to contradict the more leftward policies of his predecessors and successor. The significance of internal division within right-wing parties to Conservatives will be considered in greater detail below.

The idea that Thatcher's pursuit of radical economic transformation of the United Kingdom influenced her American counterpart is supported by a 1983 "inside scoop" *Wall Street Journal* editorial.<sup>9</sup> It explains that Reagan's closest and more conservative advisors have been pointing to Thatcher's recent electoral success (in early June 1983 the Conservatives secured a landslide election victory) to ensure that Reagan sticks to his inclination to maintain his supply-side economic policies. This suggests that senior American Conservatives were inspired by their British counterparts, and also that Reagan himself placed relatively high priority on events in the UK. Furthermore, the editorial itself is very keen on the idea that

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<sup>9</sup> The editor, "Inside scoop: The Thatcher Precedent", *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern edition (6/24/, 1983): 9.



Thatcher's success shows that right-wing economic policies have the benefit of being correct without the vice of bringing about electoral oblivion, suggesting that "only liberal American columnists" claim it is not worth comparing the United States and United Kingdom. British Conservatives also seem to have believed that they had some influence over economic policy, or at the very least wanted to have it. Within a week of each other Mrs Thatcher and her Chancellor Nigel Lawson managed to make front page headlines by calling on the United States to seek more fiscal discipline and reduce their deficit.<sup>10</sup>

Yet entanglements between figures are by no means the only evidence for trans-Atlantic influence and exchange in the economic ideas of the Conservative Movement. An analysis of the major conservative newspapers of the era from both the United States and United Kingdom shows great American and British conservative interest in each other's economic policies. Indeed, it is striking how specific the interest is; there were more *National Review* articles featuring discussion of British economic policy than the rest of Western Europe combined.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, *The Spectator* took a huge interest in Reagan's economic policy, more than any other nation, which is particularly striking given Britain's common EEC membership with most of the nations of Western Europe. Repeatedly, *The*

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony Lejeune, "Reagan and Thatcher: The Balance sheet," *National Review* 40, no. 9 (05/13, 1988): 36.

<sup>11</sup> Based on searching the EBSCO Host *National Review* Database for "Britain, or British, or UK" and "economics" versus "economics" and "France, West Germany, Holland, Belgium, Sweden."

*Spectator* and *Salisbury review* editorials lavished praise on Reagan's economic efforts, as did *The National Review* and *Wall Street Journal* on Thatcher. This seems in part to reflect a Conservative predilection for an Anglo-American alliance. As will be explored later in this paper, the 1980s was an age where this tendency manifested itself as strongly as it ever had done.

Specifically, the interest was in the policies pursued by Conservative governments. A review of the American economic coverage of British papers and vice-versa highlights how significant supply-side economics was to Conservatives in the eighties. Domestic pieces such as *National Review*'s 1980 recommendations for Reagan, in which it called for a twenty-five percent top rate of tax and a constitutional amendment to limit spending, were significant.<sup>12</sup> Yet the number of articles singing the praises of or calling for more supply-side economics in the other nation reveal that low taxes and spending were more than sensible policy to Movement Conservatives in the United Kingdom and United States. The *Wall Street Journal*'s 1982 editorial in defence of Thatcher's monetary reforms,<sup>13</sup> or its 1985 decrying of the influence of "wets" in moderating Thatcher are excellent examples.<sup>14</sup> So is *The Spectator*'s praise for the 1989 cut in the American capital gains tax-rate.<sup>15</sup> Such promotions of supply-side economics show that not only did Conservatives want what they perceived to be

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<sup>12</sup> "Let's see if it works", *National Review* 32, no. 26 (12/31, 1980): 1548-1548.

<sup>13</sup> Editorial, *Wall Street Journal*, eastern edition, (09/20, 1982).

<sup>14</sup> Irving Kristol, "The Old World Needs a New Ideology." *The Wall Street Journal*, Eastern Edition (-03-06, 1985): 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, *The Spectator*, 1989.

best for their country, but also that they had a particular view of how societies ought to be ordered. It went beyond a belief in what was the best economic policy; they believed that the world would be a better place if personal income was greater and government income less.

There was also major interest in the papers in opposition from within the right itself rather than from the left. Indeed, Anthony Lejeune, the *National Review's* main British correspondent for much of the nineteen-eighties, dismissed Labour as an irrelevance in his 1988 review of Reagan and Thatcher's premiership, emphasising that the opposition which mattered was predominantly from within the Tory party.<sup>16</sup>

This is merely one example of a wider trend which applied in both directions across the Atlantic. Ambrose Rose-Pritchard's aggressive attack on Republicans willing to compromise with Democrats over the budget in 1987 and 1990 *Spectator* articles shows that economic interest, even criticism, was focused on fellow conservatives.<sup>17</sup> This focus highlights the Conservative Movement's own revolutionary nature. Having fought so hard to displace the compromising, 'moderate' economics of 'patrician' Tories in the United Kingdom and "Rockefeller" Republicans in the United States, in the 1980s New Right Conservatives were desperate to consolidate their position as the policy-makers on the right. They appeared to be more concerned about winning this battle of

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<sup>16</sup> Lejeune, "Reagan and Thatcher: The Balance Sheet," 12.

<sup>17</sup> Ambrose Rose-Pritchard, "Can Reagan Add up," *The Spectator*, (10/31, 1987):9; James Bowman, "How to liberate the millions," *The Spectator*, (2/10, 1990): 12.

ideas on the Right than they were about defeating the left. This engaged sympathy for fellow hard-line Conservatives across the Atlantic; conservatives saw their own battles reflected overseas. *National Review's* Anthony Lejeune made explicit comparison between the "wets" and "Rockefeller Republicans" on a number of occasions, notably in his 1988 review.<sup>18</sup> In part national context must also be considered. Praise was lavished on Thatcher's neoliberal economic policies by *National Review* in 1983,<sup>19</sup> the time when the primaries for the 1984 US election were just beginning to take shape. Similarly, Thatcher's decision to continue cutting taxes throughout her Premiership was emphasised by *National Review* in 1990 when Congress was pushing for tax rises. As noted in the introduction, these newspapers were set up to try and influence Conservative politicians as well as to commentate on them. The trend for mistrust of moderates on the other side of the Atlantic also reflects how powerful the trans-Atlantic connection was for Conservatives in the 1980s.

What this mistrust also reflects is the degree to which even amongst people who would normally be considered as true Conservatives, supply-side economics took a significant amount of time to become established. In the early 1980s a number of pieces were published calling supply-side ideas into question, often utilising H.W. Bush's immortal phrase of "voodoo economics." Arthur Slessinger's 1980 critique of Thatcherism in the *Wall Street Journal* is a fine example. In his

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<sup>18</sup> Lejeune, "Reagan and Thatcher: The Balance sheet," 12.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Lejeune, "All the Way with Thatcher?" *National Review* 35, no. 3 (02/18, 1983): 192-209.

piece he wrote of his worry that Reagan would follow Thatcher's path of pursuing principled economic policy which causes undue pain to the economy. He went as far as to suggest that Thatcher was undermining British conservatism, writing, "the worship of abstract principles is surely the antithesis of the British Conservative tradition with its Burkean distrust of apriori theories."<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in *The Spectator* in late 1981 Rees-Mogg warned of monetarism driving the American economy into depression.<sup>21</sup> The *National Review* London correspondent of 1980 and '81 gave monthly reports of how British Tories are attacking the "aggressive" capitalism being promoted by Mrs Thatcher. Yet by 1982 these articles dry up. From around the re-election of Mrs Thatcher in 1983, the small numbers of criticisms that are offered about economic policy are attacks on moderation in the name of political expediency.

These newspapers suggest that the economic attitudes of British and American Conservatives swung fully behind supply-side economics at a similar time. That this transformation happened in equal measure in the British and American newspapers provides support for the idea that the Conservative Movement had strong trans-national elements to it.

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<sup>20</sup> Arthur Slessinger, "The Thatcher Experiment," *The Wall Street Journal*, Eastern edition (09/12, 1980).

<sup>21</sup> William Rees-Mogg, "Reagan, monetarism and economic pain," *The Spectator*, (10/24, 1981):11.

### Conservatives, Competition and Choice.

Linked to economics, but at least partially separated from beliefs on taxation and spending, was the fervent Conservative belief in competition and choice. Too often, neoliberal economics have been explained as the reduction in the power and size of the state and reductions in the individual tax burden. As stated in the last section of this paper, reducing taxes and state power was undoubtedly a goal not only of the Thatcher and Reagan governments, but of the New Right more broadly. Yet this is only part of the story of neoliberal economics. A belief in the moral correctness of competition, and conversely the wrongness of privilege, was one of the critical ways in which the economic beliefs of the New Right were 'New.' In addition, this belief in competition and choice became a vital aspect of Conservative ideology, driving ideas about public policy in non-economic areas of social policy.

Part of the reason that competition was such a significant element of Conservatism was the degree to which it had been discredited in the decades before the nineteen-eighties. There had been a vast state-entry into the marketplace and the presence of the state became the status quo. The power of this status-quo is reflected in the level of opposition to Thatcher and Reagan's efforts to boost competition. It had become so tarred that the bulk of the left, as well as many members of centre-right parties (Mrs Thatcher felt compelled to sack half of her Cabinet within two years of taking office) became convinced that support for competition was akin to a wish to destroy the welfare state. This belief

did not simply disappear after 1980. In the UK the Church of England published the report *Church and the City* which suggested that competitive markets were leaving vast numbers to suffer. In the United States the mainstream press such as the New York Times regularly offered case-studies about increases in homelessness. It is important therefore to consider Conservative newspaper's support for competition within the context of vast criticism from political, religious and lay elements of society.

The significance of competition to the early neoliberal intellectuals of the Mont Pelerin Society was huge. The Mont Pelerin society is an international group of academics, economists and intellectuals set up in 1947 to discuss means of protecting human freedoms. In practice its focus is on free market economics and almost every prominent neoliberal thinker of the twentieth century was a member.

Rather than the destruction of what came to be termed the “welfare state”, it was support for competition which was the most important idea to neoliberals. Ben Jackson's research into the neoliberal thinkers of the mid-twentieth century has helped highlight this. He explains at length how it is wrong to suggest, as several historians have done<sup>22</sup>, that neoliberalism was about dismantling the welfare state. Their big concern was about reducing the encroachment of government, not in eliminating government. Indeed, Hayek and his companions agreed that a welfare system which sought marginal redistribution to the poorest in society was

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<sup>22</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005).

necessary.<sup>23</sup> It is easy to forget that Walter Lipmann, the American progressive, was a founding member of the Mont Pelerin society. Jackson suggests the neoliberal thinkers of the '40s and '50s were not “reactionary and negative,” and did not seek a return to nineteenth century laissez-faire economic policy.<sup>24</sup> He points to Jewkes' attack on laissez-faire in his *Ordeal by planning* in which he suggests “the socialist attacks on the social rigidities and privileges of Victorian England were sound.”<sup>25</sup> The key word in that sentence is planning and this paper will explore how neoliberal anti-privilege seeped into almost every element of New Right ideology, both at the top and in the magazines.

Given the influence that these thinkers had on the New Right on either side of the Atlantic what they argued is of vital concern to this paper. Jackson subsequently suggested that this apparent moderation of the early academics was abandoned by the New Right in the 1970s and that they sought a more fundamental destruction of the welfare state that had been established following the Second World War.<sup>26</sup> This is where his analysis must be challenged. One of the striking features of the Thatcher and Reagan governments was their willingness to allow welfare to continue much as it had been before. Under both of them welfare spending climbed by more than 10% during their time in office. Upon Mrs Thatcher's death, the former Cabinet Minister Kenneth Clarke appeared on

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<sup>23</sup> Ben Jackson, “At the Origins of Neo-Liberalism: The Free Economy and the Strong State, 1930-47,” *The Historical Journal*, 53 (2010): 136.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 137-8.

<sup>25</sup> John Jewkes, *Ordeal by Planning* (London, 1948), 223.

<sup>26</sup> Jackson, *At the Origins of Neoliberalism*, 130.



television to suggest it was “ridiculous” to suggest the Thatcher government had attacked the welfare state.<sup>27</sup> Whilst some historians have suggested this was a failure on their part<sup>28</sup>, this actually seems to show that the neoliberal governments of the 1980s followed their intellectual forebears in focusing on competitive practice and government efficiency rather than fundamental changes to the government’s welfare role. This attitude is reflected in the Conservative newspapers of the era, with very few attacks on the government of either country for not reducing the welfare bill. Indeed, the most notable area of comment on welfare in the *Wall Street Journal* or *National Review* is praise for the Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson’s W2 welfare programme. Thompson’s program actually raised the cost of welfare, but it altered the system in a manner that compelled people to work for their benefits. Here, we see the Conservative love of competition at work. The great goal of this reform and its subsequent descendants such as the New York program was to ensure that people were not dis-incentivised from working.

The influence of neoliberal economists such as Friedman and Hayek on governments is beyond doubt; both were recruited as advisors by Thatcher and Reagan. The 1980s articles in *The Spectator* and *National Review* show that the Conservative Movement as a whole was heavily influenced by them. A search for abstracts featuring “Hayek” brings up more than 100 articles in both of these

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<sup>27</sup> Question Time, “Thatcher Special”, 59:20, April 10 2013.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography*, vol 2 (London, 2015).

magazines,<sup>29</sup> as well as over a thousand mentions in the *Wall Street Journal*.

The *National Review*'s Dinesh D'Souza actually has a 1989 article in which he heaps praise on the neoliberal economists and complains about them not having enough influence on government policy.<sup>30</sup> The commonality of influence of these neoliberal academics to Britain and America further highlights the strength of trans-Atlantic entanglements in the Conservative Movement. Indeed, the Mont Pelerin society was made up mainly from British and American based academics, ensuring trans-Atlantic exchanges of ideas; exchanges which would in later decades come to greatly influence the Conservative Movement.

Competition was a major neoliberal concern because, Jackson surmises, it was vital from the perspective of freedom that people be allowed "to make rational choices on an individual basis."<sup>31</sup> Choice was seen as a crucial element of freedom and competition was necessary to ensure choice. Neoliberals wanted to maximise competition not merely because it was felt to be the best guarantor of economic growth, but because it guaranteed freedom. Jackson summaries neoliberal economics as being "a critique of the threat to freedom posed by the encroaching power of the state"<sup>32</sup> and that power undermined competition. It is also significant that support for competition was not merely a call for the state to reduce its power. Rougier described his "true liberalism" as a creed where the

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<sup>29</sup> Based on EBSCO's *National Review* database.

<sup>30</sup> Dinesh D'Souza, "What Ever Happened to Neoliberalism." *National Review* 41, no. 10 (06/02, 1989): 34-36.

<sup>31</sup> Jackson, *Origins of neo-liberalism*, 138.

<sup>32</sup> Jackson, *Origins of neo-liberalism*, 132.

government offered each 'driver' the Highway Code, in contrast to socialism which ordered drivers where to drive and "Manchester liberalism" which offered no code.<sup>33</sup> In this context, it is possible to see how apparently anti-intervention Conservative could introduce government regulation in industries which had never seen it before.

A large element of New Right support for competition was support for the reduction of government involvement in private sector trade. At a government level Reagan and Thatcher sought to eliminate price-controls and instead allow prices to fluctuate freely. A *National Review* article had actually called on Reagan to eliminate numerous price controls including on gasoline as early as his election in 1980.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, from a neoliberal perspective the cuts to various forms of income tax were in part a means of boosting choice. Less taxation meant the individual was freer to pursue his goals; he had greater choice. These ambitions were almost universally supported by the Conservative commentariat. Indeed, *The Spectator* attacked the Democratic Party on two key Conservative bugbears in 1987, suggesting that their tax policy was designed to enforce "a form of state enforced equality which reduces competition."<sup>35</sup> Later the same year, *The Spectator's* Washington correspondent Ambrose Rose-Pritchard wrote of his frustrations at the rise in support for protectionism amongst Congressional

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<sup>33</sup> Louis Rougier, *Les Mystiques politiques contemporaines et leurs incdiencesinternationales*(1935), 68. Rougier was a French neoliberal academic and one of the founders of the Most Pelerin society.

<sup>34</sup> Editorial, "Let's see if it works," *National Review*, 32, no. 26, (12, 1980): 1552-53.

<sup>35</sup> Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, Trade-War fever, *The Spectator*, ( 02/21,1987), 9.

Democrats, claiming that it undermined competition.<sup>36</sup> The best reflection of New Right support for competition within the newspapers examined in this paper was Michael E. Porter's article explaining why competition was a great thing both for the nation and even from the perspective of individual businesses.<sup>37</sup>

Privatisation was an issue around which Conservatives congregated in this period. It was an enormous issue in British politics, making it unsurprising how much support is expressed for it on the pages of *The Spectator* and *Salisbury Review*. Yet it also features heavily in American commentary, much beyond mere reports of what the Thatcher government are doing. This reflects once again the level of trans-Atlantic interest in Conservative economics and the power of New Right ideology to transcend national boundaries (in certain contexts).

Significantly, a huge aspect of Conservative support for privatisation came from the belief that it would create competition and boost the competitiveness of struggling factories, dockyards and mines. Buckley spoke happily as late as 1990 of how the privatisation of a Belfast shipyard had seen it record its first year of profit in fourteen years.<sup>38</sup>

The large government monopolies in utilities were attacked not merely for being nationalised, but also for being monopolies. Indeed, some of the criticism of the way in which British industry was privatised shows how critical a consideration

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<sup>36</sup> Ambrose Evans-Pritchard. "Can Reagan Add up?" *The Spectator*, (10/31, 1987): 9.

<sup>37</sup> Michael E. Porter, "A good Competitor is not always a dead competitor." *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern Edition, 1985.

<sup>38</sup> William Buckley Jr., "There'll Always be an England," *National Review*, 42, no. 15 (08/06, 1990): 55.

competition was to Conservatives. *The Spectator's* Martin Ivens specifically asked in 1987 "What has it [privatisation] done to widen consumer choice.... what has it done to improve completion?" <sup>39</sup> To Ivens, simply removing things from the government was not the aim of privatisation. He pointed to the sell-off of British gas as one unit as a particularly heinous example of monopoly being preserved, contrasting it with the competition of the US regional companies. The *Wall Street Journal* expressed similar concerns about British privatisation a year earlier in an article entitled "Tory Paradox." <sup>40</sup> This rampant opposition to monopolies amongst Conservatives had its roots as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but the summary of the mid-twentieth century neoliberal Henry Simons that "the great enemy of democracy is monopoly, in all its forms" helps to establish what a crucial idea this was within neoliberal economics.<sup>41</sup>

This opposition to Monopoly was reflective of another critical element of Conservative support for competition, which was that competition was anathema to privilege. In the United States both left and right had long portrayed themselves as opponents of privilege, but in the United Kingdom this had been far less true on the right (and it could be argued, and was by the New Right, on the left). A *National Review* article at the end of Mrs Thatcher's final government reserved particular praise for the way that competition had been injected back into Britain at the expense of permanent privileges for the rich and Trade Unions.

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<sup>39</sup> Martin Ivens, "The Privatisation question," *The Spectator*, (08/27, 1987): 6.

<sup>40</sup> Barbara Toman, "Tory Paradox." *Wall Street Journal*, eastern edition, (10/6, 1988): 14A.

<sup>41</sup> Henry Simons, *A Positive programme for laissez-faire* (1934): 4.

It noted with pleasure how “She has persuaded people that there is no virtue in a badly run business”, praising how competition in enterprise was no longer seen as an ill in the United Kingdom.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the same article suggested that American Conservatives feel that American “enterprise culture” has spread to the UK and assails privilege as the enemy of competition and “just” economics. Bethell notes how Thatcher receives criticism from the left for her “replacement of socialist privilege.” Critically, he also emphasises how Thatcherite economics has displeased moderate, traditionalist conservatives such as Quintin Hogg and the former Prime Minister Harold MacMillan. He suggests that the key reason for criticism of Thatcher from both left and right is her assault on their privileges. The “encroachment of the market economy” upsets many in “a country where the advocacy of one variety of privilege (Tory) or another (Labour-Trade Union) usually predominates.”<sup>43</sup>

The praise offered by American Conservatives to British competition provides yet further evidence for trans-Atlantic interests amongst Conservatives. Furthermore, Bethell’s description of the promotion of free market competition at the expense of privilege as the introduction of an “American market order” offers an insight into how American Conservatives viewed privilege as a British trait.

Opposition to privilege and belief in competition were also crucial aspects of Conservative opposition to the power of Trade Unions. Tom Bethell’s use of the

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<sup>42</sup> Anthony Lejeune, “Class.” *National Review* 42, no. 21 (11/05, 1990): 81-84.

<sup>43</sup> Tom Bethell, “The Goddam Middle Class,” *National Review* 38, no. 1 (01/31, 1986): 38-41.

term “socialist privilege” is far from unique and this phrase is helpful in understanding how Conservative opposition to trade-unions was not purely partisan.<sup>44</sup> They were not merely opposed to trade-unions because they were left-wing groups; they saw the Trade-Unions as giving out special privileges to their members, and in doing so denying free market competition. A *Spectator* article from the early 1980s attacks “closed shop” arrangements in both the British legal system and the City of London, suggesting that this presents an unfair barrier to entry and undermines consumer choice.<sup>45</sup> Paul Johnson attacked a similar situation amongst the printers of Fleet Street, decrying “That great social evil, the closed shop.”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Johnson emphasises the connection between a lack of competition and Union power, suggesting that the Fleet Street closed shop “is a form of monopoly achieved by coercion.” Anti-Unionism was similarly strong in American Conservative circles; there were almost as many articles dedicated to the (perceived) Union scourge in *National Review* in the ‘80s as there were in *The Spectator*. For example, in 1986 *National Review*’s The Week heaped praise on the fact the National Labor Board had suggested some work could be shifted from unionised to non-unionised workers, saying “Americans have more choice, and unions can’t handle it.”<sup>47</sup> As with its British

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<sup>44</sup> Though Trade Union support for left-wingers was a concern. Buckley wrote in 1990 of how appalled he was that Trade Union money went on political funds supporting “the Democratic Party or worse.” (Buckley Jr., Wm F. “The Neglected Right.” *National Review* 42, no. 17 (09/03, 1990): 55

<sup>45</sup> The editor, “Not in the Public Interest”. *The Spectator*, (12/10, 1983): 3.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Johnson, “Crying out for reform.” *The Spectator*, (10/24, 1985): 20.

<sup>47</sup> “The week,” *National Review* 37, no. 15 (8/9, 1985): 13.

counterpart, *National Review* 's opposition to Unions stemmed above all from its support for greater competition.

Trade Unionism is an area of policy where these newspapers offer relatively little in the way of trans-Atlantic opinions. Nonetheless, it remains important to this analysis for two reasons. Firstly, the similarity of approach needs to be recognised. Secondly, Trade Union policy is significant because it demonstrates how important competition and opposition to privilege were to Conservatives in this era. Arguments made about Unions in *National Review* and *The Spectator* were consistent with the broader arguments made about competition and as such show how similar this element Conservative ideology was on either side of the Atlantic. From this one can extrapolate the common influence of the neoliberal thinkers mentioned above.

Labour relations, whilst not strictly economic, serve a chiefly economic purpose. Education on the other hand is certainly a social rather than economic area of policy. That it too was impacted by the Conservative faith in competition is further evidence of how powerful this idea was. In the United Kingdom, the Assisted Places Scheme was introduced by the Thatcher government in 1980. Rather than being compelled to attend their local state-run Comprehensive School, pupils whose parents could not afford to send them to private schools had their fees totally or partially paid for by the government if they finished in the top fifteen percent of the entrance exam. It was a minor reform in terms of numbers, with an average of around 6,000 pupils per year affected. Yet, the Assisted Places



Scheme was more significant than the numbers affected both because it allowed parents greater choice in education, and because it marked a clear break with the previous trend of more Comprehensive schools. Competition was reflected not merely in greater choice for the individual; the practice of rewarding the top performing pupils with better schooling made the process of school choice itself more competitive. The Scheme had wide-ranging support in *The Spectator*.<sup>48</sup>

In the United States a similar scheme in Wisconsin, like the W2 welfare program introduced by Conservative Tommy Thompson, received huge support in *National Review* based for most part on support for greater competition in schools. *National Review*'s support for the scheme mostly took the form of attacks on the teaching Unions and liberal commentators that opposed it, with the accusation being that "The protestations...are perversely procedural and self-protective."<sup>49</sup> It goes on to suggest that the government should not have a monopoly on "public good" and that the public schools "fear the idea that people should have a choice."

It is noticeable how little role race played in this particular debate over school choice. In the United States, unlike the United Kingdom, non-comprehensive education gained an association with segregation owing to the suggestion by some segregationists in the 1960s that allowing people to choose which schools they sent their children to offered a way to avoid public school desegregation. Yet

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<sup>48</sup> E.g. Nicholas Budgen, "The Politics of the Classroom", *The Spectator*, (05/01/1987): 14.

<sup>49</sup> "Public-School Perversity." *National Review*, 42, 13 (7/9/1990).

the *National Review* was not reacting to claims that the new Wisconsin scheme was racist. It actually had relatively high support amongst liberal black legislators because the provision which meant it aided only poor children meant it disproportionately affected black families. Furthermore, because Milwaukee (where the big majority of Wisconsin's black population lived) was one of the United States' most residentially segregated cities, the school vouchers system could not be interpreted as means of allowing white people to avoid sending their children to schools with high minority populations. The residential segregation meant that the desegregation of public schools had very little impact (black neighbourhoods had schools with almost entirely black student-bodies and vice-versa).

The basis of both British and American Conservative support for such schemes was how they encouraged greater competition. Significantly, this was not done through cuts to government funding for education provision. Rather, it was that the funds were used in a manner which emphasised individual choice over that of the governments. This is further vindication of Jackson's argument that neoliberalism was not merely a creed which set out to remove the state. Rather, it was about controlling the state's centralising and anti-liberal tendencies.

## Conservatives and the Sexual Revolution

A consideration of domestic aspects of American and British Conservatism must also examine Conservative attitudes towards social issues. Indeed, it seems that alongside foreign policy, it was the traditionalist social attitudes of Conservative Movement acolytes and intellectuals which ensured the “Conservative Movement” was about more than neoliberal economics in both the United Kingdom and United States.

Historians of American Conservatism have granted far more prominence to social issues such as women’s rights, gay rights, minority rights and law and order than their British counterparts. The American “culture wars”, the battle between right and left over social issues, have had much material devoted to them.<sup>50</sup> There is not a comparable tone on the history of the British right’s social attitudes, though Michael McManus’ recent book on the Conservative Party and homosexuality has offered greater insight into attitudes to gay rights.<sup>51</sup> However, as with so much of the existing literature on British Conservatism in this period, it revolves specifically around the Tory Party rather than right-wing politics more broadly.

The issues grouped under the “sexual revolution” are women’s rights, gay rights and abortion. This area of analysis differs from the previous areas of supply-side

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<sup>50</sup> James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle To Control The Family, Art, Education, Law, And Politics In America* (1992); Daniel K. Williams, *God’s own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (2010) ; Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?* (New York, 2004).

<sup>51</sup> Michael McManus, *Tory Pride and Prejudice: The Conservative Party and Homosexual Law Reform* (Biteback Publishing, 2011).

economics and competition. Unlike in those areas, there are very few examples of American articles discussing the British government's social policies or vice-versa. Indeed, there are relatively few in either newspaper relating to the policies pursued by their own government. This seems to reflect two important factors. Firstly, social issues were more culturally than policy-based to Conservatives in the 1980s. They held power in both nations, but beyond minor reforms their chief goal was to resist left-wing pressure for legislative reform. This meant in particular that foreign newspapers commented a comparatively small amount on social issues in other countries. The majority of foreign coverage in either the *National Review* or *The Spectator* was dedicated to analysing actual government policy. Secondly, and equally importantly, it seems to highlight how much less revolutionary and remarkable Reagan and Thatcher's social policies were than their economic policies. Their economic policies, whilst coming in for occasional criticism in Conservative newspapers for being too moderate, were such a break with what had come before that they were always comment-worthy. By contrast, the social policies pursued were unremarkable to the Conservatives who dominated these newspapers.

This relative lack of direct interest in the policies of the other nation does not mean that the social attitudes of these papers are insignificant to a Trans-Atlantic history of the New Right. In Cooper's comparison of Thatcher and Reagan he notes that different "national contexts" meant the 'trans' element of his 'trans-

Atlantic' history was partially limited.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, it is possibly fair to suggest that the actual transfer of social attitudes across the Atlantic in this context was not major. Nevertheless, the similarly traditionalist Conservative social attitudes expressed in both *The Spectator* and *National Review* show the significance of the connection between the United Kingdom and United States. That Conservatives in both nations pursued neoliberal economics alongside traditional Conservative attitudes towards family life, gay rights and abortion imply that the neoliberal intellectuals who inspired the New Right had a similar effect in both Britain and America.

Indeed, it is remarkable how in spite of significant differences in the two countries, there was a striking similarity in the attitudes towards the "sexual revolution" expressed in their respective chief Conservative periodicals, *The Spectator* and *National Review*. America was the more religious country by far in the eighties, church-attendance being more than twice as common.<sup>53</sup> Williams follows much American historiography of the 'culture wars' when he suggests that they emerged owing to the remarkable religiosity of the United States and the subsequent impact this had on the Right. If *National Review* alone expressed robustly Conservative opinions on social issues then this thesis would carry more weight, but the similarity of opinions in it to those in *The Spectator* suggests it is somewhat lacking. Despite the different cultural contexts in Britain and America,

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<sup>52</sup> James Cooper, *Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan: A very Political Special Relationship* (2012).

<sup>53</sup> Gallup Religious Practice Poll, 1988.

there was major alignment amongst Conservatives on attitudes around the sexual revolution and this is further evidence of trans-Atlantic connections within the Conservative Movement.

The phrase “traditional Conservative” would be a reasonably accurate term to describe the attitudes of both the British and American New Right to the sexual revolution. However, this is in need of a qualification. The phrase could imply that New Right social attitudes were at odds with a more ‘liberal’ economic attitude. Rather, the study of the contemporary Conservative newspapers suggests that whilst they had a traditionalist outlook to questions of the place of women or wrongness of homosexuality, they separated their disapproval from clear policy proposals. Thus in the view of Conservatives, their “toleration” of groups such as homosexuals ensured a consistent valuing of freedom.

Within the New Right, traditional ideas relating to the family remained strong and women’s rights campaigns were looked upon unfavourably. Gilder offered a stringent defence of the traditional role of the family in society in his 1986 article in *National Review*. He associates “feminists” and the “contemporary sexual liberal’s goal of reproduction and the associated tasks becoming a societal rather than particularly female role with the Marxist aim of society taking on the “general production.”<sup>54</sup> He emphasises the importance of mothers and makes the claim that “The prisons, reformatories, foster homes, mental institutions and welfare rolls of American already groan under the burden of children relinquished to

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<sup>54</sup> George Gilder, “The sexual revolution at home.” *National Review* 38, no. 19 (10/10, 1986): 30.

‘society’ to raise and support.”<sup>55</sup> In addition, Gilder attempts to combat the arguments of Betty Freidan that women need greater opportunity. He quotes a pair of sociological studies in the late ‘70s which suggested that suburban housewives were amongst the least isolated Americans.<sup>56</sup>

The New Right’s conceptualisation of women’s rights campaigners as a left-wing special interest is made clearer still in a mocking two-line *National Review* article from 1985, in which the author suggests female affirmative action for the best looking women (this being based on a study which found “beautiful women do less well than plain ones in the higher echelons of business.”<sup>57</sup> This anti-feminist attitude is even clearer in *The Spectator*. Richard West writes numerous articles of a similar vein to Gilder’s in the *National Review*, notably one where he jokes that for British feminists “Not a day passes...without.... the production of new sociological evidence of the nastiness of men.”<sup>58</sup> Auberon Waugh is equally as forthright in his protests against the “women’s rights lobby”, calling for all the feminist “public bodies” to merge into the “National Organisation of Madwomen.”<sup>59</sup>

Yet the articles on women’s Rights cannot be entirely summed up as male attacks. There were several female writers at *The Spectator* decrying the perceived extremism of the Women’s Right’s campaigns. One of them, Vicki

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<sup>55</sup> Gilder, *The sexual revolution at home*, 32.

<sup>56</sup> Gilder, *The sexual revolution at home*, 31.

<sup>57</sup> “The week,” *National Review* 37, no. 15 (8/9/1985): 12-16:

<sup>58</sup> Richard West. “A liberated woman,” *The Spectator*, (20/02, 1981): 15.

<sup>59</sup> Auberon Waugh. “Another Voice,” *The Spectator*, (10/31 1987): 8.

Woods, had an article which matches up closely to Gilder's in *National Review*. Like Gilder, Woods decries the decline of the family, pointing out that 85% of divorced mothers will be on state benefits. Indeed, she explicitly lays blame for the decline of the family and the blow this has caused children of divorce on the "sexual revolution."<sup>60</sup>

The attitudes expressed in British and American Conservative newspapers on gay rights are almost identical. Of all areas, the articles focusing on homosexuals most highlight the New Right combination of a small-statist attitude with fervent moral beliefs. Two themes emerge; the Conservative emphasis on tolerance of homosexuals as opposed to acceptance, and their hatred for the "gay lobby."

Tolerance is the overriding theme in both *The Spectator* and *National Review*. The difference between tolerance and acceptance is spelt out a number of times. *The Spectator* suggests "it is odious for the law to punish homosexual acts between consenting adults in private" but that this does not mean that homosexuality is 'valid' or even admirable."<sup>61</sup> Auberon Waugh, a stringent anti-homosexual, also calls for tolerance in *The Spectator* by attacking those calling for all clergy to have to reveal their homosexuality even when it is not interfering with work.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Woods, Vicki. "Making Fathers Pay." *The Spectator*, (11/3/1990): 9.

<sup>61</sup> "Decent and Indecent," *The Spectator*, (3/14/ 1987):5.

<sup>62</sup> Auberon Waugh, "Another Voice: A terrible dilemma for the Church of England at the present moment in time." *The Spectator*, (5/22, 1987) : 8.



Such sentiments are reflected in Short's *National Review* piece in which he argues that the left have determined one needs to declare one's sexuality in a bid to "politicize the bedroom" and tried to redefine tolerance as approval."<sup>63</sup> Short argues that these efforts explain why no Conservative could support the "gay rights movement"; he believes it is an attack both on privacy and sexual morality. Evidently, the Conservative conception of freedom prized the right of individuals to discriminate and suggested the government must merely tolerate, rather than accept minority groups such as homosexuals.

Writing as though they could work for the same newspaper rather than ones 3000 miles apart Johnson and Buckley each offer damning verdicts on CBS' original decision to suspend David Rooney for suggesting too many "homosexual unions" was a problem for America. Whilst both defend Rooney's statement, they are more concerned with the supposed growing power of the gay rights movement and the influence it can exert. Buckley suggests that rather than anything to do with homosexuals themselves, "what is more portentous is that the casual ascription of bigotry has become a routine part of American life."<sup>64</sup> Six years earlier Colin Welsh had expressed similar fears about "the way in which homosexual activists have, as I said, advanced boldly, immodestly, proselytising and demanding ever new 'rights', privileges, ells and so on."<sup>65</sup> To these writers, the gay rights movement was apparently synonymous with gay "privilege." The

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Short. "Gay Rights Or Closet Virtues?" *National Review* 42, no. 18 (09/17, 1990): 44.

<sup>64</sup> "Cost-Free Calumny." *National Review* 42, no. 5 (03/19, 1990): 17.

<sup>65</sup> Colin Welsh, "In response," *The Spectator*, (12/1, 1984):23.

closest that either paper came to a statement which calls for a policy relating to homosexuals (as opposed to actively wanting no policy) was Taki's call in *The Spectator* for New York and San Francisco to close down their bathhouses.<sup>66</sup> Yet in the vast majority of cases the newspapers feature articles expressing a general distaste for homosexuality and opposition to its entering the public sphere, alongside a general toleration of its existence in the private sphere.

A remarkable aspect of the coverage of gay rights in either newspaper is the consistency of the attitudes expressed in the writing. The only major change is that AIDS becomes a more common theme as the decade goes on. Yet the growing discovery of AIDS as being a disease which hits homosexuals most of all did not trigger either a more sympathetic or harsher attitude to homosexuality on either side of the Atlantic.<sup>67</sup> The difference is that slightly more articles were written about gay rights in the later eighties as the gay liberation movement grew, with groups such as the Aids Coalition To Act Up gaining greater press traction.<sup>68</sup>

This interesting combination of traditional Conservative attitudes and neoliberal freedom of choice did not exist with abortion. Abortion was perceived as falling outside of such bounds because it was viewed as killing; no amount of toleration could be allowed for killing.

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<sup>66</sup> Taki Theodoracopulos, "High Life: The Aids Syndrome." *The Spectator*, (10/25, 1985):38.

<sup>67</sup> A search of *The Spectator* archive lists 14 articles which feature the phrase "immoral" and "homosexuals" in the same sentence in the 1980s. 8 are in the first half of the decade and 6 in the second.

<sup>68</sup> *The Spectator's* archive lists 45 abstracts from 1980-85 featuring the words "aids" and "homosexual", and 52 from 1985-90.

The starting position of Conservatives on both sides of the Atlantic was that abortion was wrong in all circumstances. Richard Neuhaus expressed this view in the *National Review*<sup>69</sup> in 1989 and Mary Kenny the same in *The Spectator* in 1987.<sup>70</sup> One of the major issues which both Britons and Americans wanted to tackle was the presentation of abortion as a women's issue. Neuhaus suggests that it is a purely moral question of "the weighting of a human life against the reasons for terminating that life" as opposed to a gender-related one.<sup>71</sup> Likewise a *Spectator* editorial in the run up to a major vote on term-limits at Westminster tries to debunk the idea it is a 'women's issue', noting that left-wing female members of the press such as Polly Toynbee used this as a stock line, despite polling showing that abortion is far more popular with men than women.<sup>72</sup> The way in which this issue was separated from others is well demonstrated by Johnson's expressed horror at the phrase "right to choose" on the grounds it suggests that having children is merely another consumer choice.<sup>73</sup> Given the aforementioned significance of consumer choice to the Conservative Movement this is particularly significant; abortion was outside the scope of capitalism to the bulk of the New Right. Paul Johnson emphasised this in his attack on the phrase "right to choose" being associated with abortion.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Richard John Neuhaus. "After Roe." *National Review* 41, no. 6 (04/07, 1989): 38

<sup>70</sup> Mary Kenny, "The chance of a lifetime." *The Spectator*, (10/16, 1987): 14.

<sup>71</sup> Neuhaus, *After Roe*, 40.

<sup>72</sup> "Turning Abortion's tide," *The Spectator*, (10/23, 1987): 5.

<sup>73</sup> Paul Johnson, "When is a fetus disposable?" *The Spectator*, (12/ 5, 1987): 27.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Johnson, "When is a fetus disposable?", *The Spectator* (12/5, 1987): 27.

That said, Conservative commentators were not totally unaware of political realities and as such there are examples of them compromising. Once again, however, this applies in equal measure on either side of the Atlantic, with Kenny noting what an improvement eighteen weeks would be on twenty-eight in the United Kingdom and Buckley any kind of cut in the USA.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, it is interesting how politicised abortion was in both *National Review* and *The Spectator* given that abortion time limits were unchallenged in the UK for a decade up to 1987 and it was deemed to be a judicial rather than legislative question in the USA from 1973 to 1988.<sup>76</sup> The relative lack of religious emphasis in either the United Kingdom or United States also indicates that what was once a religious issue had developed into a partisan one

### Conclusion

Conservatives in the United Kingdom and United States had a great amount in common during the nineteen-eighties. Reflecting the closeness of their Conservative heads of governments, and the relative similarities in the policies pursued by those governments, the writers in *National Review* and *The Spectator* advocated very similar things throughout the period.

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<sup>75</sup> Kenny, *The Chance of a lifetime*, 14; William Buckley Jr, "Abortion on the line", *National Review* 41, no. 14 (08/04, 1989): 12-13.

<sup>76</sup> The United States Congress and State legislatures were unable to pass restrictions on abortion from 1973 to 1988 following the Supreme Court ruling in *Roe versus Wade*. The ruling was partially retracted in 1988.

The introduction set out three different ways to examine trans-Atlantic elements. The first, namely interest in the policy of the other nation, was most clearly reflected in economic policy, particularly policy relating to taxation and public spending. Supply-side economics was probably the single biggest change that the Thatcher and Reagan governments made, and thus perhaps it is unsurprising that this comes across as the most overwhelmingly important aspect of Conservatism in these newspapers. Both *The Spectator* and *National Review* offered vast amount of column inches to support for supply-side transitions in the other country, as well as even more in their own. What the difference in coverage granted to foreign supply-side economics over issues such as labour relations or social issues indicates is that Conservatives themselves saw this as the most important issue of the day. Looking at how the two papers covered the other country, it is apparent that from an Atlantic perspective radical economic reform was what mattered most within Domestic policy. Conservatives in America cared a great deal about economics in Britain; they were less concerned by education policy.

What the analysis in this paper also highlights is how similar was the ideology of Conservatives on either side of the Atlantic. The repeated emphasis on competition in arguments relating to regulation, privatisation, trade union and even education highlights how wedded most Conservatives of the era were to the neoliberal ideas first put forward in the thirties and continually advanced by the likes of Hayek. Even if they were not consciously aware of the fact, which the

regular references to neoliberals suggests they were, the Conservative columnists who dominated these newspapers were imbedded with neoliberal ideas.

This is made clearer still by the passion expressed for the supply-side economic reforms which were transforming both countries for most of the titular period. Likewise, the almost identical attitudes expressed on the major social issues of women's rights, gay rights and abortion highlight how neoliberalism influenced Conservatives. In this area the critical influence of neoliberalism was toleration. The focus on freedom ensured that even the most hardline anti-homosexuals such as *The Spectator's* Auberon Waugh did not advocate reintroducing anti-sodomy laws. Rather, the focus of Conservative opposition became the "rights" groups which sought greater recognition and more equitable representation in the public sphere.

The focus on Conservative newspapers rather than politicians seems to be particularly significant. Whilst they did wish to be influential and there were obvious constraints of decency, *The Spectator* and *Salisbury Review* had no electoral concerns. Therefore, the fact they focus on competition rather than unwinding the welfare state and on rejecting the gay rights movement rather than homosexuality itself is hugely telling. The ideological picture of Conservatives which this paper paints of neoliberal economics combined with elements of traditional conservatism and a libertarian streak is more believable because it is based mainly on newspapers. If the lip-service paid by Conservatives to the right

of homosexuals to practice privately was false, then one would expect to see newspapers such as these calling for more radically anti-gay policies than they did.

The level of inter-governmental entanglements and influences covered in this paper were few, mainly because the vast majority were over foreign policy.

Those that did emerge domestically (based mainly on the knowledgeable coverage of the two newspapers) were about economics. These showed that on the practicality of supply-side economics if nothing else, there was clear trans-Atlantic influence. Reagan was boosted by Thatcher's electoral success; it boosted his faith in Reaganomics.

It appears that there were trans-Atlantic elements to the Conservative Movement in the nineteen-eighties. These elements were not universal across different sections of policy or attitude. Whilst there was indeed a striking similarity in the views on domestic issues, including social issues, on either side of the Atlantic, it was only in neoliberal economics where there is clear evidence of governmental influence. In addition, it was neoliberal economics where active support for the other country to adopt Conservative policies was noticeable. Neoliberal ideas came from Hayek, Ropke and many others, and lacked national constraints. As such they heavily influenced Conservatives on both sides of the Atlantic, resulting in neoliberalism being the most powerful, though not the only, common ideological feature.

**Liberal International? The American takeover of London's *Spectator***  
**Newspaper 1859-1861.**

London's *Spectator* newspaper in the period 1859 to 1861 illuminates two major elements of Anglo-American political relations. Firstly, it draws attention to how America was looked upon favourably by British Liberals. It establishes that by the late 1850s it was not merely radicals in Britain who looked benignly upon America's greater sense of classlessness and democracy. Secondly, it helps to illustrate how Liberal Party and Democratic Party ideology overlapped in that era of the nineteenth century. From early 1859 to early 1861 The *Spectator* was remarkable because of its proprietors. They were a pair of London-based Americans, Benjamin Moran and James McHenry. Moran worked in the Buchanan Administration's London office as Assistant Secretary to the Minister to Great Britain. During this period the magazine's American coverage was turned on its head, with its former hostility to the Buchanan administration being transformed into positive coverage bordering on the sycophantic.

The Anglo-American relationship is probably the bilateral relationship most covered by historians. Numerous periods of the so-called "special relationship" have been explored, ranging from investigations into the nature of British influence on the earliest colonists in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to attempts to decipher the nature of the Bush-Blair relationship. Comparatively little has been done comparing political attitudes and ideologies in the two countries in the mid-



nineteenth century. When analysis has been done, the focus has often been on governmental rather than ideological relations, such as Lehmkuhl and Schmidt's book.<sup>77</sup> In their introduction to a collection of essays on Anglo-American relations, Leventhal and Quinault suggest that "the national bias of each country's historiography and history curricula has ensured the neglect of Anglo-American connections after the United States became independent of Britain."<sup>78</sup> Much of the comparative political analysis of the nineteenth century has ignored the period running up to the Civil War. For instance, Patricia Lee Skyes' *Presidents and Prime Ministers* attempts to see parallels between crucial liberal figures on either side of the Atlantic, but skips from Andrew Jackson and Sir Robert Peel to Grover Cleveland and William Gladstone.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Kelley's *The Transatlantic persuasion: The Liberal-Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* mainly covers the post-civil war period.<sup>80</sup> Importantly, Kelley's piece does address the compatibility of Liberal and Democratic party politics, though mostly in the post-civil-war era and focusing mainly on Democratic admiration for Gladstone. There has been too little scholarly attention paid to this connection with trans-Atlantic focus often being on American Whig admiration for Britain.<sup>81</sup> *The Spectator* from 1859 to 1861 helps to illustrate how similar Liberal values in Britain were to

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<sup>77</sup> Ursula Lehmkuhl and Gustav Schmidt, *From Enmity to Friendship: Anglo-American Relations in the 19th and 20th century* (Augsburg, 2005).

<sup>78</sup> Fred M. Leventhal and Ronald Quinault, *Anglo-American Attitudes: From Revolution to Partisanship* (Burlington, 2000):1.

<sup>79</sup> Patricia Lee Sykes, *Presidents and Prime Ministers* (Lawrence, 2000).

<sup>80</sup> R. Kelley, *The Transatlantic persuasion: The Liberal-Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (Knopf, 1969).

<sup>81</sup> Anthony Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979).

Democratic ones in America, though this was complicated by slavery. During Buchanan's Presidency, despite the ideological overlap, British Liberals tended actively to oppose Buchanan because of his anti-abolitionist position, The *Spectator* was unique amongst Liberal papers in its support for him.

In the late 1850s both American and British politics had recently undergone major political realignments. In the first part of the decade the American Whig party had collapsed and the opposition to the Democratic Party became greatly fractured, with the nativist and anti-Catholic Know-Nothings emerging alongside other regional parties. The Democratic Party was the most successful of the era and James Buchanan was elected on the Democratic ticket in 1856. By 1858 the anti-slavery Republican Party had become entrenched as the Democrats' main rivals and the question of slavery policy was dominating American politics.

American politics became more sectional because of this. Whether a congressman was a southerner or northerner, an abolitionist or slaver, came to matter more and issues such as immigration, trade and taxation became less salient as slavery and the existence of the Union came to fore. In the 1850s, based on *DW Nominate* scores, this sectionalism became the greatest predictor of how a Congressmen would cast their votes.<sup>82</sup> Buchanan sought to maintain unity in the country which was bitterly divided over the slavery issue. He failed to

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<sup>82</sup> DW NOMINATE is A political science tool used to measure congressional voting patterns. In the early 1850s the second dimension, used to measure sectionalism as opposed to broader policy, overtook the first dimension as the best predictor of voting. See Rick Valelly, Jim Wiseman and Phil Everson, "NOMINATE and American Political History: A Primer." [http://voteview.com/pdf/nominate\\_and\\_political\\_history\\_primer.pdf](http://voteview.com/pdf/nominate_and_political_history_primer.pdf).

do so and the slave states became increasingly alienated, eventually seceding in 1861 with the Republican Abraham Lincoln's victory in the Presidential election.

British politics in the era was chaotic also. Party labels had always been less meaningful in Britain, with no official parties on ballots and Members of Parliament choosing the group with which they wanted to be associated. The withdrawal from the Conservative block by Prime Minister Robert Peel and one hundred of his allies in 1846 had further complicated matters, leading to a series of brief governments under various banners. A sense of stability returned as the Liberal Party emerged as a dominant force in the late 1850s, becoming a formal group in 1859. The Liberals were broadly the party of greater representation for non-elites, free enterprise and opposition to privilege, in contrast to the Conservatives who sought to maintain the existing social and religious order.

The *Spectator* was founded in 1828 by Robert S. Rintoul. He would go on to be proprietor-editor for thirty years. It had a Liberal outlook from the start, a notable early example of this perspective being its demands for the passage of the Great Reform Act with the legendary headline "the bill, the whole bill, and nothing but the bill."<sup>83</sup> From the beginning it was a success, the 1857 Newspaper Press Directory describing it thus: "This journal, for twenty-seven years, has occupied a leading position amongst the weekly press of the metropolis."<sup>84</sup> The magazine has had remarkable longevity, currently being the longest continuously publishing

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<sup>83</sup> *The Spectator*, April 15 1832:4. This was a mock-up of the oath taken in British courts to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

<sup>84</sup> *The Newspaper Press Directory* (UK), 1857: 28.

English language magazine in the world. Its politics shifted in the late nineteenth century however and it is now by far Britain's best known weekly magazine with a conservative political outlook.

Yet despite the remarkable longevity there have been relatively few attempts to analyse its history. Two articles and a monograph provide the bulk of the historiography,<sup>85</sup> with the occasional reference in press histories. The period of American ownership which this paper will seek to address is an especially notable hole in the history of the newspaper because William Beach Thomas was not aware of it when he wrote his monograph on the first century of the magazine. Malcolm Woodfield refers to the period but focuses on a subsequent proprietor. Richard Fulton's article is the only major piece on this intriguing period in the newspaper's long history.

In late 1858 the London press was, with the exception of the Times, critical of the Buchanan administration. Buchanan's refusal to take a hostile view of slavery was anathema to most of the British press. There was also a sense that the growing sectional resentment in the United States was down to a lack of leadership on the part of Buchanan.<sup>86</sup> At this time *The Spectator* came up for sale and via a proxy in the form of *The Spectator* writer Thornton Hunt two

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<sup>85</sup> Richard Fulton, "The *Spectator* in Alien Hands," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 24 (1991): 187 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20082560>, Malcolm Woodfield, "Victorian Weekly Reviews and Reviewing after 1860: R. H. Hutton and The *Spectator*" in *The Yearbook of English Studies* 16 (1986)

and William Beach Thomas, *The Story of The Spectator* (London, 1928).

<sup>86</sup> The final edition of *The Spectator* prior to the American takeover ( *The Spectator*, December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1858: 14) is a fine example, stressing both of these criticisms.

Americans were able to purchase the paper for 4,200 pounds. Significantly, the President who was receiving the hostile press was James Buchanan, the previous Minister to Great Britain and the man whom Moran had first served as secretary.<sup>87</sup>

#### The Buchanan administration's paper in London

That McHenry and Moran's ownership of the newspaper transformed its coverage of Buchanan's Presidency is undoubtable. The shift in the paper's attitude towards the President from the final pre-American ownership issues in late 1858 and the start of their proprietorship was remarkable. Before the Americans took over the paper *The Spectator* was damning in its criticism of Buchanan. Detailed policy criticisms were few, but it offered stringent objections to the power of slavery in American politics. In late 1858 it took delight in noting how the policy of Buchanan "will be reversed by any successor" and that "Public opinion has pronounced against it" at the Congressional elections.<sup>88</sup> A few weeks beforehand *The Spectator* accused the executive branch of the American government of being "at the orders of the southern oligarchy" and generally deserving of scorn for damaging the liberty which had previously defined America.<sup>89</sup> One of the final issues before the ownership changed hands was the Christmas Day edition of 1858 in which Buchanan's State of Union Address was described. It was dismissed as "verbiage" and it was claimed that "never before"

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<sup>87</sup> Fulton, *The Spectator in Alien Hands*: 187

<sup>88</sup> *The Spectator*, 27 November 1858:12.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 6 November 1858:14.

had the tool of “regular elections” been used to emphasize the frustration of the people during a “Chief ruler’s” reign.<sup>90</sup> This was a reference to the losses sustained by Buchanan’s Democratic party in the Congressional elections of 1858.

The hostility of these articles make the subsequent pro-Buchanan slant of *The Spectator* under McHenry and Moran all the more apparent. Compare the aforementioned reaction to his State of the Union address in late 1858 to that of 1859. Reporting on it in early 1860, *The Spectator* argued “The Message delivered to Congress on the 27th of December is a document of unusual ability.”<sup>91</sup> The magazine was consistently and aggressively pro-Buchanan. When a Congressional Committee was investigating him for potential corruption, the paper dismissed them as partisans, claiming “It must be borne in mind that in all countries whose Government is based upon a popular suffrage, whether in Europe or America, it is the custom for the opposition or 'the outs,' to attack the Government.”<sup>92</sup> In the same article Buchanan was hailed as “that President who has alone displayed the capacity, the courage, the will, and the elevated national virtue, to administer the affairs of the Republic for the Republic.”<sup>93</sup> The paper claimed that Buchanan’s pro-union, anti-abolitionist leadership was rescuing America in a time of potential crisis. In similar circumstances the following year they expressed sympathy for Buchanan and hostility to John Covode and the

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<sup>90</sup> *The Spectator*, 25 December 1858:14.

<sup>91</sup> *The Spectator*, 14 January 1860:3.

<sup>92</sup> *The Spectator*, 19 March 1859:13.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

committee on public expenditure on which he had taken a leading role in publishing a report accusing the President of wrongdoing.<sup>94</sup>

Enemies of Buchanan's of course were not limited to Opposition or Republican politicians. He broke with fellow Democrat Stephen Douglas and what Kenneth Stampf refers to as the "Young America" wing of the Party.<sup>95</sup> Young America was a strongly nationalistic, northern group of the Democratic party who, whilst not abolitionist, was less wedded to supporting slavery than Buchanan. They were contrasted with doughfaces; northerners like Buchanan who supposedly had southern principles. *The Spectator* under Moran and McHenry decried the disunity in the Democratic Party, but it attributed no blame to Buchanan. It pointed to "Judge Douglas" as a culprit, a man who had "a peculiar personal ambition" which led him "to speculate in a policy of hostility to Mr. Buchanan."<sup>96</sup> The paper went a step further in their coverage of the 1860 election, accusing Douglas of having "seceded from his party" unlike the "purely Democratic candidate" Breckenridge.<sup>97</sup> The paper also attempted to downplay the significance of Douglas and his allies within the party, referring to him as "a demagogue, and the leader of a small section of the Democratic Party" (in fact Buchanan had won nearly thirty percent of the popular vote to Breckinridge's

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<sup>94</sup> *The Spectator*, 21 April 1860:12.

<sup>95</sup> E.g. A transcription of panel discussion of the James Buchanan Conference held at Franklin and Marshall College, 21 September 1991. Panelists: Don Fehrenbacher, Kenneth M. Stampf, Robert Johannsen, Elbert Smith in *James Buchanan and the Political crisis of the 1850s*, ed. Michael J. Birkner (London, 1996).

<sup>96</sup> *The Spectator*, 29 September 1860:13.

<sup>97</sup> *The Spectator*, 24 November 1860:1. Breckinridge was endorsed by Buchanan.

eighteen).<sup>98</sup> According to *The Spectator* Buchanan was a standout president: “We believe, however, that we are simply stating a fact when we say that Mr. Buchanan's immediate predecessors had not altogether reached the standard which he has restored.”<sup>99</sup>

Seemingly out of support for the Buchanan administration the paper was determined to downplay the chances of secession. Following Lincoln's election, they suggested he would in reality pursue a moderate course and that the doomsayers predicting the end of the Union were worrying far too much, as proven by the success of the Constitutional Unionist Bell in some upper southern States.<sup>100</sup> A week before the South Carolinian Senators resigned their Senate seats *The Spectator* ruled out the possibility of secession.

The pro-Buchanan shift of the newspaper cannot be said to reflect a general move in his favour either in British liberal circles or amongst the London Press. This is perhaps best reflected by the first issue after the Americans McHenry and Moran sold *The Spectator* to Meredith Townsend. Having been steadfastly defended in the January 5<sup>th</sup> and January 12<sup>th</sup> editions of *The Spectator*,<sup>101</sup> under new ownership the paper panned him, referring to him as “The American Bourbon.” It declared of secession “For this fearful complication no man is more answerable than Mr. Buchanan.” They went on to suggest that if Buchanan had

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<sup>98</sup> *The Spectator*, 24 November 1860:8.

<sup>99</sup> *The Spectator*, 29 September 1860:13.

<sup>100</sup> *The Spectator*, 27 November 1860:11.

<sup>101</sup> *The Spectator*, 5 January 1861:7, 12 January 1861:4.



shown this “small amount of determination...four months ago” he “might have saved the union” and “would have saved his reputation and the honour of the national flag”, the implication being that both were ruined.<sup>102</sup>

Before the Americans sold the newspaper in early 1861 *The Spectator* was possibly more pro-Buchanan than any newspaper in the United Kingdom or United States. The British press, except The Times, had been lined up against him throughout his time in office. He had never been able to count on much of the Northern Press in the USA and as the crisis of southern separatism got worse he lost his tepid southern support also.<sup>103</sup> Supporters of slavery expansion, abolitionists and all of those in between could agree that Buchanan had either acted wrongly or failed to arrange a compromise to keep these diverse groups together. Yet *The Spectator* continued to present him as a valiant figure doing all he could in the face of adversity and treachery, claiming “secessionists” had “warped the conduct of Mr. Buchanan.”<sup>104</sup>

Why? Moran’s diary gives a clear indication that he held Buchanan at least partially responsible for the impending collapse of the Union, stating “I am at times disposed to look upon this great evil as the work to a large extent of Mr. Buchanan.”<sup>105</sup> One can infer that it was one or a combination of personal,

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<sup>102</sup> *The Spectator*, 19 January 1861:2.

<sup>103</sup> Mark W. Summers, “Dough in the Hands of Doughface?”, *James Buchanan and the Political Crisis of the 1850s* ed. Michael J. Birkner: 78-81.

<sup>104</sup> *The Spectator*, 12 January 1861: 9.

<sup>105</sup> Benjamin Moran, “Diary”, in *Journal of Benjamin Moran 1857-1865, The Diary of a Secretary At The United States Legation in London During an Important Period in American History*, (Chicago, 1949) ed Sarah Agnes Wallace: 765.

partisan, professional and patriotic reasons. Moran had been under-Secretary to Buchanan when the latter had been the Minister to London and was also a Pennsylvania Democrat. He continued in the role under Buchanan's successor, meaning that throughout his period as an owner of *The Spectator* he was working for the State Department in London, giving him both professional and patriotic connections to the administration. Moran's diary entry of January 9<sup>th</sup> partially hinted at the power of his personal links to Buchanan, stating that *The Times'* decision to charge Buchanan with the destruction of the Union "is not unfounded" but that he had "ever loved Mr B."<sup>106</sup>

### Was Fulton Right?

It has been established that under the stewardship of McHenry and Moran *The Spectator* was exceptionally pro-Buchanan. Indeed, Ricard Fulton claims "From early 1859 to early 1861, *The Spectator's* commentary on American affairs read like a Buchanan administration propaganda sheet."<sup>107</sup>

Fulton's piece is largely informative and insightful. However, two aspects of his conclusion seem to rely too heavily on speculation and ought to be challenged. Firstly, Fulton contends that the American ownership of the newspaper was "one small dimension of how the Buchanan administration tried to influence the British government, into a sympathetic view of the administration's policy toward slavery

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<sup>106</sup> *Journal of Benjamin Moran*:193.

<sup>107</sup> Fulton, *The Spectator in Alien Hands*:188

and the Southern independence movement.”<sup>108</sup> There is a distinct lack of evidence directly linking the Buchanan administration to Moran’s joint ownership of *The Spectator*. Probably, it was a personal enterprise.

Fulton does not present any evidence regarding the acquisition from a member of the Buchanan administration beyond Moran’s own diary. Furthermore, Moran’s partner McHenry was an American businessman in London unconnected to the administration. Fulton did have access to the diary of George Dallas, the former vice-president who was the American Minister to Great Britain whom Moran served as assistant secretary in this period. There was no indication of contact from Washington regarding buying a British paper. He does reference Moran’s diary statement in 1858 that “we are now without a journal in England, except the Times” in regard to the question of slavery.<sup>109</sup> If this suggests anything significant it seems to be that Moran was a believer in the Buchananite position of granting concessions to the south over slavery. This could be drawn upon as evidence that genuine partisan political feeling made him want to influence the British press via a newspaper.

The other claim of Fulton’s which should be challenged is that “owning *The Spectator* clearly paid political dividends to the Buchanan administration.” What were these political dividends? Fulton argues they were twofold. Firstly, that the many important liberals who read the magazine would have been influenced by

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<sup>108</sup> Fulton, *The Spectator in Alien Hands*:194.

<sup>109</sup> *Journal of Benjamin Moran*: 20.

its “American direction,”<sup>110</sup> and secondly that *The Spectator* coming out fervently against the abolitionist cause and in favour of Buchanan influenced the rest of the British press. One problem with both of these theories is that there was rarely more than one article a week discussing American politics and on many occasions, including the first two weeks of American ownership, none at all. It seems even less probable that the American government would take the effort to arrange the purchase of a paper only to have it regularly ignore American affairs.

He paraphrases Alvar Ellegard’s description of *Spectator* readers, writing that they were “liberal in politics, MPs, peers, professional people, and businessmen, both in England and the colonies- in other words, the decision-makers and opinion makers of the realm.”<sup>111</sup> It seems fanciful to suggest that one of many prominent weekly papers (alongside a number of dailies and semi-regular radical pamphlets) could have had much of an influence. The Liberal MPs reading the paper would have been reading other papers too. Furthermore, we do not know the circulation of the paper, only that it declined under Moran and McHenry’s ownership based on Moran’s diary entries<sup>112</sup> and Beach Thomas’ very bare summary of the period.<sup>113</sup>

The idea there was a shift in the London Press on slavery thanks to *The Spectator* is also challengeable. He acknowledges that *The Times* was the only

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<sup>110</sup> Fulton, *Spectator in Alien Hands*: 194.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid: 187.

<sup>112</sup> *Journal of Benjamin Moran*: 763.

<sup>113</sup> Beach Thomas, *The Story of The Spectator*: 56.

other paper to support the relatively pro-slavery position of Buchanan.<sup>114</sup> Thus his claims regarding influence on other papers, which he acknowledges are “coincidence, possibly” rely on a particular example of the *Saturday Review* moderating their criticisms of the administration from 1859 to 1860 and then returning to criticise it once *The Spectator* was sold. Yet *The Spectator* was sold at the same time as the Civil War was breaking out; every British newspaper was condemning the Union government and getting behind the southern rebels.

### Liberals and America

Party labels were self-applied in Britain until the 1880s and the first formal meeting of the Parliamentary Liberal Party was in 1859. What historians refer to collectively as the Liberal Party was thus largely loose and varied collection of self-styled Whigs and Radicals. Even after its foundation in 1859 it was significantly less defined and organised than either of the main American parties. Broadly, Radicals were more fervent advocates of change and opponents of privilege. Whigs generally advocated steady reforms to the constitution, whilst Radicals called for immediate changes to be made in favour of greater democracy. Radicals also tended to come from a more evangelical, non-Anglican religious background. Whilst Radical continued to be a label attributed to

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid: 194. Fulton’s statement that “Perhaps the American government could have maintained reasonably good relations with the British through the good offices of the Times” is a further indication that his argument is partially predicated on an unsubstantiated opinion that the American government took a direct role in trying to influence the British press.

politicians throughout the nineteenth century, by the late 1850s almost all Whigs and Radicals referred to themselves as part of the Liberal Party. Liberalism in this era was defined by support for a small state and a reduction in government-based privileges. As such Liberals, whether they came from a Whig or Radical background, supported low taxation, low public spending, tolerance of religious dissenters and above all free trade. These values made them and the American Democrats natural bedfellows.

*The Spectator* was in the late 1850s very much a part of the Liberal mainstream. Beach Thomas' history of the paper emphasises that it was always a relatively unpartisan Liberal paper, noting how when it was started in the 1830s it "backed the Whigs when they pursued the course of justice and good sense, and roundly abused them for any sign of back-sliding."<sup>115</sup> The former Whigs and Radicals (plus some Peelites<sup>116</sup>) were all now part of the Liberal party. *The Spectator* had offered support to elements of all three of these groups previously and was clearly supportive of the Liberal Party in this era and the few years preceding it. It could thus fairly be said to be in the mainstream of British Liberalism.

In *Spectator* articles about the United States not overwhelmingly concerned with partisan issues (which focused on support for Buchanan) there was a strong pro-American emphasis. Part of this played to nationalistic concerns, emphasising that America and Britain shared a common heritage and race. *The Spectator*

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<sup>115</sup> Beach Thomas, *The Story of The Spectator*: 107.

<sup>116</sup> Moderate former Conservatives who had left the Conservative Party.

endorsed Richard Cobden's claim that "in the event of any danger to this country, nothing could prevent the great bulk of the population in the United States hurrying to the rescue of the old mother-country."<sup>117</sup> There were also numerous allusions to the importance of the nation's common Anglo-Saxon heritage and its role in political culture, for instance in September 1860 an article contrasted Mexican's "foreign habits in their political affairs" with the upstanding nature of the "Anglo-Saxon Republic" of the United States.<sup>118</sup>

*The Spectator* also shows how there was a great deal of Liberal admiration for America's more democratic politics. There has been considerable scholarly attention paid to American Whig admiration for the moderation of the British constitution by the likes of Howe.<sup>119</sup> Sexton suggests that Whigs "could not conceal their admiration of Britain."<sup>120</sup> There has been less attention paid to the positive attitude of British Liberals toward America. Quinault suggests "Americans regarded British politics as aristocratic, whereas Britons thought American politics were democratic."<sup>121</sup> This seems to be accurate but does not fully explain the situation. Because of these stereotypes, the more aristocratic American Party (the Whigs and their descendants) and the more democratic British party (the Liberals) looked longingly across the Atlantic. The famous

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<sup>117</sup> *The Spectator*, 2 July 1859:15.

<sup>118</sup> *The Spectator*, 29 September 1860:13.

<sup>119</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979): 77, 210, 211.

<sup>120</sup> Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine* (Oxford, 2011):113.

<sup>121</sup> Fred M. Leventhal and Ronald Quinault, *Anglo-American Attitudes: From Revolution to Partisanship*:5.

British writer Trollope addressed the phenomenon in his 1867 political novel *Phineas Finn*, in which the arch-liberal Turnbull was described, among other things, as having “almost idolatrous admiration for all political movements in America.”<sup>122</sup> When British attitudes have been considered, they have tended to focus on earlier Radical admiration for the United States’ supposed classlessness and egalitarianism. Epstein notes how powerful the idea of America as a land of liberty remained for British radicals in the 1840s, suggesting that for them, “America remained a place of dreams, of populist yearning. The vision of the western republic based on the free yeoman farmer- free from religious, economic and social controls- died hard.”<sup>123</sup>

Yet *The Spectator*’s stated admiration for various elements of American politics and political history between 1858-61 shows that by then fondness for the United States was a Liberal trait, not merely a radical one. *The Spectator* noted how the American revolution was inspired by English history, suggesting “We can scarcely understand how General Washington could have been trained to his great duties, if he had not had the precedent of Cromwell.”<sup>124</sup> They went on in that issue to endorse the principles of the American revolution, stating “the most loyal Englishman.....can scarcely blame the American citizens because they construed the British Constitution better than King George and his Ministers

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<sup>122</sup> Anthony Trollope, *Phineas Finn* (London, 1969):198-99.

<sup>123</sup> James Epstein, “America in the Victorian cultural imagination, “*Anglo-American Attitudes: From Revolution to Partisanship*, ed. Fred M. Leventhal and Ronald Quinault:115

<sup>124</sup> *The Spectator*, 16 July 1859:14.



did.”<sup>125</sup> The paper did not merely accept that the Americans were within their rights to rebel against British rule, but also praised the United States as a major positive influence on the case for reform in Britain, stating “we have some difficulty in defining the amount of debt which our Reform agitators owe to those who so well illustrated Constitutional principles in the British Colony across the Atlantic.”<sup>126</sup>

*The Spectator*’s overwhelmingly positive coverage of the United States (when not considering partisan political questions) did not reflect a radical attitude at the paper from 1859-61. As stated, it was a paper in the mainstream of British Liberal politics. Nor was it merely a reflection of the biases of its owners, as was its support for Buchanan.<sup>127</sup> Rather, it is evidence of how “Americanised” the Liberal Party of the late 1850s had become. What had once been considered radical positions on the franchise were now in the Liberal mainstream and this meant that the more democratic United States was viewed in a positive light by almost all Liberals.

One of the most significant elements in the formation of the Liberal Party was the decline in the influence of the aristocratic Whig attitude which emphasised the need for strict franchise restrictions. It is not that these aristocratic Whigs

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid:15.

<sup>127</sup> Unlike its attitude to Buchanan, the magazine’s attitude to representation and Anglo-American relations had been consistent since before the American takeover. E.g. *The Spectator*, 26 January 1856: 11. An article on the future of central America which endorses a joint Anglo-Saxon influence in the region and *The Spectator*, 25 December 1859: 9. The *Spectator* advocates for a reform Bill to go before Parliament.

disappeared from the party, a useful illustration of this being that the first two Liberal Prime Ministers were Viscount Palmerston and Earl Russell. Rather, what were once exclusively radical demands for wider suffrage permeated the party so that from the mid-1850s franchise expansion was supported by the vast majority. Every Liberal government from 1859 until 1922, attempted to pass a bill which expanded the size of the British electorate.

Thus a more “American” attitude favouring wider political representation was dominant within British Liberalism as a whole. It became common to associate Liberal and American attitudes on the subject. . The Conservative Party leader Disraeli suggested Gladstone’s 1866 Reform Bill, which sought to reduce the property qualification for voting, was an attempt to replace the British constitution with an American one.<sup>128</sup>

*The Spectator* shows that representation was not the only issue where Liberal and American values overlapped. In common with the entirety of mainstream American politics in the era, it criticised various forms of “direct taxation,” expressing concern at the level of both property and income tax and expressing the hope that Britons would not “endure a heavy burden of direct taxation after our defensive labours shall have been completed.”<sup>129</sup> In the United States the direct taxes *The Spectator* opposed were not merely unpopular but unconstitutional. Whilst offering broad praise for Gladstone’s 1860 budget it

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<sup>128</sup> Gladstone was the Liberal Chancellor and a very prominent and popular figure in the party, becoming leader in 1867 and eventually being Prime Minister 4 times.

<sup>129</sup> *The Spectator*, 5 January 1861: 14.

expressed concern that he had maintained income and property taxes while abolishing various indirect taxes.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, in late 1859 they criticized a radical proposal to reform the system of taxation and base it entirely on the value of property owned by an individual. They insisted that a just tax system was not merely based on extracting the most out of those with money, but on people paying for what they used. What would later be termed laissez-faire predominated.<sup>131</sup>

### Liberals and Democrats

*The Spectator* combined a strongly partisan, pro-Democratic party attitude with support for Liberal politics. That these elements were able to co-exist without ideological contradictions or even much tension is a strong indication that there was an ideological closeness between these two political movements. Indeed, the only volte-face made by *The Spectator* in the aftermath of the takeover McHenry and Moran was in its coverage of Buchanan and the sectional conflict which dominated American politics at the time. At the least this indicates that the Democratic and Liberal movements were not natural enemies.

*The Spectator's* combination of support for Buchanan and Liberal politics in Great Britain supports the theory put forward by the likes of Kelley that the

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<sup>130</sup> *The Spectator*, 14 April 1860:3.

<sup>131</sup> *The Spectator*, 10 December 1859:10.

American Democrats and British Liberals were ideological bedfellows.<sup>132</sup> *The Spectator's* attitude to the significant issues of representation, taxation, public spending, and public morality shows that Liberals and Democrats shared a good deal of common ground. Central to both parties' ideology was a belief that there needed to be firm limits on the power of the state, on the influence of elites and that the popular will ought to have great influence of political affairs. They also had a shared belief in keeping public spending and taxation low, as well as scepticism of the government pursuing great moral crusades. Although their level of commitment to free trade was unequal, they were also both the anti-protectionist parties in their respective nations.

Howe has noted how historians have identified a "common liberalism" between the two nations, in particular focusing on the admiration for Gladstone from many American Democrats and for Edwardian New Liberals by the Progressive Republicans of the early twentieth century.<sup>133</sup> Sykes is an excellent example. She argues that all successful, "conviction style" leaders in both the United Kingdom and United States "articulate similar ideas, ones that adapt liberal ideology to suit changing circumstances."<sup>134</sup> Whilst history has focused on later leaders, there is also evidence for Liberal ideas and sympathies crossing the Atlantic in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. James Epstein, examining the British press coverage of the death of

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<sup>132</sup> Robert Kelley, *The Transatlantic persuasion: The Liberal-Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (New York, 1969).

<sup>133</sup> Anthony Howe, "Free Trade and the International Order: The Anglo-American Tradition, 1846-1946," in *Anglo-American Attitudes*. 142,

<sup>134</sup> Sykes, *Presidents and Prime Ministers*: ix.

Andrew Jackson in 1845, noted how much positivity there was for him from radical papers such as the *Northern Star*, which portrayed him as a heroic man of the people. Their obituary depicted him next to the recently deceased former British Prime Minister Earl Grey and invited readers to contrast the two men in an editorial entitled “The Republican and the Aristocrat contrasted”, in which they sang the praises of the Democratic President and the political system he endorsed which “invests sovereignty in the people .<sup>135</sup> By contrast, the more conservative paper *the Globe* condemned him for surrendering to the populace’s “universal thirst for an actual share in power”, leaving America to resemble ancient Athens. Here once again the complicated origins of British Liberalism are in evidence. Significantly, it was the radical attitude to sovereignty which came to dominate British Liberalism.

On occasion the policy beliefs of the two parties slightly differed. Yet they shared resoundingly similar views. In his work on the American Whig Party, Howe notes how the *American Review* described the two main American political parties in 1846: “There is a law and order, a slow and sure, a distrustful and cautious party- a conservative, a Whig party; and there is a radical, innovating, hopeful, boastful, improvident and go-ahead party- a Democratic, a Loco-Foco Party!”<sup>136</sup> This dichotomy is one which Howe and Holt are both keen to emphasise. Howe rejects the term “liberal” regarding American Whigs based on their “moral absolutism, paternalism and preoccupation with discipline” but is happy to use

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<sup>135</sup> Epstein, “America in the Victorian cultural imagination,” *Anglo-American Attitudes*: 113.

<sup>136</sup> Howe, *Political Culture of the American Whigs*: 210.

“conservative.” There is a wealth of evidence to support Howe’s case. The eighteenth century Tory Lord Bolingbroke<sup>137</sup> was an inspiration to Whigs and the future Republican Secretary of State Seward was able to rouse a Whig meeting by evoking Bolingbroke’s authority on the need “to regenerate the first principles of the constitution.”<sup>138</sup> Howe suggests both that the “decline of deference” felt threatening to Whigs and that their fondness for Burke showed “how important their conservatism was to them.”<sup>139</sup> Ronald Quinault is keen to point out that whilst historians such as Laski and Basler speak of Lincoln as one of the key figures in the nineteenth century Democratic tradition, Lincoln at no point referenced Democracy in a speech or writing and in 1836 endorsed a tax-based franchise that excluded many.<sup>140</sup> This evidence adds to the case that a major aspect of American Whiggery was to conserve the existing order, a goal which had always existed in British Toryism but which Robert Peel’s Tamworth Manifesto of 1834 made an explicit goal of the British Conservatives. He explained it as a response to a fear of “a perpetual vortex of agitation.” A potential challenge to the relevance of this apparent association is that the Whigs had ceased to exist for several years by the time Moran and McHenry took charge of *The Spectator*. Yet here, in Lincoln and Seward, there are examples

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<sup>137</sup> Lord Bolingbroke was a prominent figure in the “country party” in the mid eighteenth century. It was a group of Tories who claimed to seek to serve the interests of the nation as a whole as opposed to the Whigs they ascribed to be members of the narrower “Court Party.”

<sup>138</sup> William Henry Seward, “speech at a Whig Mass Meeting in Yates County,” N.Y., Oct 29, 1844, Works, 3:260.

<sup>139</sup> Howe, *Political Culture of the American Whigs*: 219, 237.

<sup>140</sup> Roland Quinault, “Anglo-American attitudes to Democracy from Lincoln to Churchill”, *Anglo-American Attitudes*: 126.

from the first Republican President and his greatest rival for the primary and Secretary of State. This is an illustration of how influential former Whigs were in the new Republican Party. Most Republicans had been Whigs and the majority of Lincoln's cabinet were ex-Whigs. Whilst not a direct continuation, the Republicans were on the same side of the political divide as Whigs on most issues.

Fiscal policy is another area where *The Spectator* highlights the ideological similarity of Democrats and Liberals. In both its British and American coverage the paper calls for governments to be more restrained in their spending. The paper praised Buchanan's call in his state of the Union Address of 1859 for American public spending to be curtailed.<sup>141</sup> It was also totally consistent in its calls for British public spending and taxation to be kept low. When the Conservative Party was briefly in power under the leadership of Lord Derby at the start of 1859 *The Spectator* launched an attack on Disraeli's "miserable" budget, concurring with John Bright's attack on the government's 711 million pounds of revenue from taxation as being too high.<sup>142</sup>

*The Spectator* under Moran and McHenry draws attention to how laissez-faire attitudes to economics predominated in the British Liberal movement of this era. That was this combined with an aggressive support for James Buchanan and the Democratic Party, without desperate explanations for policy differences being

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<sup>141</sup> *The Spectator*, 14 January 1860:3.

<sup>142</sup> *The Spectator*, 12 March 1859:4.

necessary (his policies were pretty consistent with what *The Spectator* advocated for the British economy), draws attention to the ideological consistency of the Democratic and Liberal parties.

*The Spectator* reflects a non-moralising style of politics which came to dominate the mainstream of the Liberal Party. They shared the Democratic party's more laissez-faire attitude to governmental moral restrictions. The paper offered a freedom-centred defence of boxing (at the time a sport with strict restrictions), arguing that "Sayers and Heenan will fight, it is certain" and decrying "the busybodies" who "hunt them from county to county."<sup>143</sup> The paper's support for the bill against Church Rates was argued not from an anti-establishment (of the Church of England) position but rather on the grounds people should not be compelled to pay for something they do not believe in: "it is a proof of obstinate infatuation to argue that Dissenters should be compelled to pay for the support of a Church from which they have seceded for conscience' sake."<sup>144</sup> In its support for the rights of the individual over the state as a moral arbiter on religious and moral issues, *The Spectator* shows that the Liberal mainstream's attitude to such issues resembled those of the Democratic mainstream. The Democrats were the party which Catholics turned to prevent Yankee evangelical dominance of

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<sup>143</sup> *The Spectator*, 14 April 1860:3.

<sup>144</sup> *The Spectator*, 20 April 1861:4.



education and civil society.<sup>145</sup> A laissez-faire approach predominated, as it did on fiscal policy.

This also suggests that ethno-cultural historians such as Hays and Holt have under-valued ideology in their analyses of ethno-religious question and politics.<sup>146</sup> The religious make-up of the Democratic and Liberal parties was very different, yet their opposition to state-support for religion was similar as was their lack of interest in pushing policies based on religious moral positions, such as restricting vices. This cannot have been culturally based. The radical, non-conformist wing of the Liberal Party had a great deal in common religiously with the Republican Party and there were very few Catholics or anti-confessional Protestants (who made up the bulk of the Democratic Party) in Britain. Thus the commonality of Democratic and Liberal moral and religious policy can be put down to a common ideological perspective rather than cultural links.

Free trade was one of the defining features of Liberal politics in this era. It was a policy which united all of the disparate groups of the Liberal Party together. Thus it is unsurprising that *The Spectator* was a resolute supporter of free trade from the late 1820s until deep into the twentieth century. The paper admitted in 1860 that "For our own part, we do not hesitate to say that we look upon free trade as

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<sup>145</sup> Richard L. McCormick, Ethno-cultural interpretations of nineteenth-century American Voting Behavior," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol 89, no.2 (Jun, 1974): 368.

<sup>146</sup> A good survey of the field is provided in Ricard McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy* (Oxford, 1988):29-64.

a benefit which can never be carried to excess.”<sup>147</sup> They also launched a stringent attack on ship-owners who were “asking for hostile tariffs.”<sup>148</sup>

In spite of Franklin and other founding fathers advocating free trade, it was a policy which divided America and the mother country for most of the nineteenth century.<sup>149</sup> The Democrats of the late 1850s were not avowedly anti-Protectionist. Howe notes how a number of historians who have argued for a common liberalism between the United States and Britain in the nineteenth century have focused on Democrats’ regard for Gladstone, but suggested that “this mutuality fell short of common adherence to free trade.”<sup>150</sup> Howe draws attention to free trade links between the two countries, focusing on American societies such as the Philadelphia Free Trade Convention and writers such as W.C. Bryant as evidence of how a free-trade movement was maintained in the US.<sup>151</sup> *The Spectator* provides primary evidence of this. In its reports of Richard Cobden’s 1859 trip to America it notes how the “touching attentions” he received whilst being known as the “great champion of free trade” show that “rightly represented, free trade finds in free America no ungenial welcome.”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *The Spectator*, 1 September 1860:13.

<sup>148</sup> *The Spectator*, 10 December 1859:11.

<sup>149</sup> A. Howe, “Free Trade and the International Order: The Anglo-American Tradition, 1846-1946, *Anglo-American Relations*:142.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid: 143. He uses R. Kelley, *The Transatlantic Persuasion: the Liberal-Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (New York, 1969) and H. C. Allen and R. Thompson (eds), *Contrasts and Connections: Bicentennial Essays in Anglo-American History* (London, 1976), p. 245-70 as examples.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid: 144-6.

<sup>152</sup> *The Spectator*, 2 July 1859:5.

Yet Howe ignores the partisan element of the American free trade debate. Whigs and later Republicans were wedded to the tariff as a source of revenue.

Significantly, the biggest reduction in the tariff for decades was Buchanan's Tariff Act of 1857. Ironically, The Democrats were not a free trade party. Their views varied considerably; Buchanan famously complained of being assailed as a villain by both wings of his party on the issue. Yet in the context of the United States, where Republicans remained committed to raising revenue from the tariff, the Democrats were the more free-trade party. Given how central debates over tariffs were to British and American politics this is vitally important to understanding the connection between the Liberals and the Democrats.

*The Spectator's* reports of Cobden's visit to America illustrate that it was Democrats who were far more amenable to his anti-protectionist arguments. Following his visit, a Massachusetts Democrat named D. B. Bradford wrote letters to much of the British press, including *The Spectator*, about how brilliant Cobden's speeches were. He also claimed that Buchanan had eventually hosted Cobden in the White House for four days, so much did he enjoy his company.<sup>153</sup>

The Democrats were the only party with anything in common with Liberals on free trade. No Republican-controlled newspaper could have so extolled the virtues of free trade. *The Spectator*, controlled by Democrats, opted to emphasise the potential in American for free-trade support, rather than explaining the case for protectionism.

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<sup>153</sup> *The Spectator*, 16 July 1859:14.

*The Spectator* of 1859-61 addressed relatively few American political issues directly. The sectional battle over slavery utterly dominated its American coverage. *The Spectator* makes clear that the Buchananite attitude towards slavery had nothing to do with its merits and all to do with the maintenance of the Union. They condemned Governor Wise of Virginia as making “drunk” statements about the potential for the Union to end in 1860.<sup>154</sup> They also mocked former Navy Secretary James Paudling of New York for being a pro-slavery northerner “when even the South was ashamed of that institution.”<sup>155</sup>

More significantly, the manner in which the paper expressed its support for Buchanan’s anti-abolitionist position shows that there was at least some liberal justification for it. It demonstrates that whilst slavery was by this time a uniquely American issue, Democratic support for the “peculiar institution” did not totally undermine the party’s Liberal credentials. Given how the goal of the paper’s American coverage was to advance the cause of James Buchanan, it is hardly surprising that it pinned the blame for the growth in the sectional divide between North and South on his Republican opponents and Democrats such as Douglas who were more willing to compromise. Yet the paper did not opt to explain the slavery debate by dismissing it as “peculiar institution” that was tied into the uniqueness of America. In part, its intense focus on the question of the Union’s future meant that the actual debate was downplayed and the emphasis placed on how slavery was necessary for the survival of America. However, they also

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<sup>154</sup> *The Spectator*, January 21 1860:10.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

attacked Republican abolitionists for ignoring the constitution and the property rights of slave-owners. In an apparently subtle attempt to link the Republican Party with the Conservative Party they claimed “the Abolitionist party in the United States has to a great extent continued the course originated by the old Tory party...it is to a great extent hostile to the constitution.”<sup>156</sup> It also appealed to property rights, accusing abolitionists of ignoring them, in contrast to the British abolitionists of an earlier era.<sup>157</sup> Significantly, this shows that regardless of the overwhelming British Liberal support for abolition in this era, Liberal arguments predicated on self-determination and civil liberties could be put forward. Despite their attitude to abolition the vast majority of British Liberals supported the Confederate cause (Gladstone referred to them as having “made a nation”<sup>158</sup>) once the Civil War broke out. *The Spectator’s* attempts to justify what became Confederate positions demonstrate that there was an ideological foundation for Liberals to back a non-abolitionist position.

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<sup>156</sup> *The Spectator*, 21 April 1860:12.

<sup>157</sup> *The Spectator*, 10 September 1859:13.

<sup>158</sup> Letter to Mrs. Gladstone (14 January, 1860) in F. W. Hirst, *Gladstone as Financier and Economist* (Oxford, 1931).

## Conclusion

*The Spectator* of McHenry and Moran is a fascinating and useful source. It adds to the historiography of Buchanan's Presidency and of the history of the State Department. More significantly, it is a source which illuminates Liberal admiration for the United States and the ideological similarities between Britain's Liberal Party and America's Democratic Party in the lead up to the American Civil War.

*The Spectator's* proprietors' sycophantic support for Buchanan reveals both that some support for his Presidency existed and that loyalty to his administration was firm in the American office in London. Yet the reality that this paper was the only one in Britain (The Times offered tepid support rather than outright hostility like other papers), and one of the very few anywhere, to offer such support, is particularly damning. If it does not reflect on his failures as President, it must reflect on a catastrophic failure of presentation to the public. In order for a paper to be in favour of James Buchanan's Presidency, it had to be owned and run by a member of his administration from the same county in Pennsylvania who had worked directly for Buchanan before his election!

Regarding ideology, *The Spectator's* content adds support to Robert Kelley's thesis that the Democratic and Liberal parties were natural bedfellows (though Kelly pays little attention to the years 1859-61). Liberal ideology, as it was in the 1850s, was remarkably compatible with support for James Buchanan. A large aspect of that was the laissez-faire attitude shared by Democrats and Liberals to fiscal and moral policy. Critically, both parties served as the anti-protectionist

force in their politics and Buchanan was notably strong on this issue. Even on slavery, despite the general Liberal abhorrence, *The Spectator's* support for the continued existence of slavery in America shows that an anti-abolitionist (though not pro-slavery) position was not incompatible with a generally Liberal ideology. There were some Liberal arguments to endorse such a position. The Liberal and Democratic Parties fit well ideologically, there was also a more general fondness for America as a land of less privilege and more equality amongst British Liberals.